

PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS:  
THE PRACTITIONER AS SEEN BY THREE OF HIS  
PUBLICS

Milton Sumner Baker

JUDLEY KNOX LIBRARY  
POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720





PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS:

THE PRACTITIONER AS SEEN BY

THREE OF HIS PUBLICS

---

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

San Diego State University

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Mass Communications

---

by

Milton Sumner Baker, Jr.

Summer 1976

T175001

Thesis  
B1687

PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS:

THE PRACTITIONER AS SEEN BY

THREE OF HIS PUBLICS

---

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

San Diego State University

---

by

Milton Sumner Baker, Jr.

Summer 1976



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lest the casual reader (or the graduate student facing a thesis) be tempted to think otherwise, let it be said here for the record that a thesis of this nature--based on a substantial mail survey--is a laborious, time-consuming and expensive affair. While keeping the scholarly aim of the study in focus presented an enjoyable challenge to me, the sheer logistics of the study at times seemed almost insurmountable. It follows that the study could not have been completed without the very substantial assistance of a great many people. While it is not possible to recognize all who helped, I would like to recognize those who contributed most.

First and foremost, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Allen H. Center, visiting professor of public relations at San Diego State University. If I served as the architect and chief contractor for this study, it was Allen who provided the inspiration for it and served as its guiding light when the study was in its formative stages. Moreover, he was absolutely instrumental in obtaining a grant for me to help defray the costs associated with the study. Without Allen Center's help, encouragement and friendship, this study could not have come to fruition.

Secondly, I wish to recognize the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education and its executive secretary, Dr.



Frederick H. Teahan, for the grant provided to help with the expenses required by the survey. The grant was essential in allowing me to conduct a study of this nature, and I am grateful to the Foundation for its help.

Thirdly, I want to thank Lloyd Zusman of the Social Science Research Laboratory of San Diego State University. Thanks to his perception, perserverence and broad knowledge of computer programming, Lloyd was able to coax two computers into taking the raw data from my survey and putting it into meaningful form for me. To me--a complete novice when it comes to computers--it was almost as if Lloyd cajoled the computers into performing magic.

I also want to recognize the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Frederick C. Whitney, chairman of the journalism department, who served as chairman of the committee; Dr. James K. Buckalew of the journalism department, who served as the second member of the committee; and Dr. Donald G. Wylie of the department of telecommunications and film, who served as the third member of the committee. While the beautiful San Diego weather beckoned to them, they spent far too much of the summer of '76 inside--reading, critiquing and re-reading drafts of my thesis. The thesis has surely profited because of their willingness to provide their help.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to make note of the firm and unwavering support, encouragement and help given by my wife, Judy. From the menial chores like licking stamps and



stuffing envelopes to the more substantive tasks such as critiquing drafts and keeping me pointed at the forest when at times I must have seemed preoccupied with the trees, she deserves a great share of the credit for this thesis. Without her love and understanding, the thesis would be a great deal less than it is.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                            | Page |
|--------------------------------------------|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .                 | iii  |
| LIST OF TABLES . . . . .                   | ix   |
| Chapter                                    |      |
| 1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .                  | 1    |
| THE PROBLEM . . . . .                      | 4    |
| Statement . . . . .                        | 4    |
| Analysis . . . . .                         | 4    |
| Limitations . . . . .                      | 6    |
| Definitions . . . . .                      | 6    |
| 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND . . . . .         | 9    |
| IVY LEE: A PIONEER . . . . .               | 10   |
| EDWARD BERNAYS: P.R. COUNSEL . . . . .     | 16   |
| CONCERN WITH REPUTATION . . . . .          | 19   |
| THE PRACTICE EXPANDS . . . . .             | 21   |
| FURTHER EXPANSION AND MATURATION . . . . . | 23   |
| A PROFESSION? . . . . .                    | 26   |
| GROWTH IN THE SIXTIES . . . . .            | 29   |
| PERCEPTIONS IN THE SEVENTIES . . . . .     | 36   |
| 3. METHODOLOGY . . . . .                   | 40   |
| COLLECTION PROCEDURES . . . . .            | 40   |
| Top management sample . . . . .            | 40   |
| Journalist sample . . . . .                | 41   |



|                                                 |    |
|-------------------------------------------------|----|
| General public sample . . . . .                 | 41 |
| DESIGN SHORTCOMINGS . . . . .                   | 42 |
| PRETESTING . . . . .                            | 42 |
| TREATMENT OF THE DATA . . . . .                 | 43 |
| 4. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA . . . . .               | 44 |
| RESPONSE RATES AND DEMOGRAPHICS . . . . .       | 44 |
| Top management sample . . . . .                 | 44 |
| Journalist sample . . . . .                     | 45 |
| General public sample . . . . .                 | 48 |
| Typical respondents . . . . .                   | 49 |
| ANALYSIS OF THE DATA BY SUBPROBLEM . . . . .    | 50 |
| Defining public relations . . . . .             | 50 |
| Professionalism and professions . . . . .       | 53 |
| Occupational prestige . . . . .                 | 55 |
| Perceived effectiveness . . . . .               | 57 |
| Strongest and weakest points . . . . .          | 64 |
| A necessary function? . . . . .                 | 71 |
| Public relations and good performance . . . . . | 72 |
| Honesty and trustworthiness . . . . .           | 74 |
| Image of the practitioner . . . . .             | 77 |
| Public interest and welfare . . . . .           | 78 |
| Importance of public relations . . . . .        | 80 |
| Relationships between variables . . . . .       | 80 |
| 5. COMPOSITE PICTURES . . . . .                 | 94 |
| AS PERCEIVED BY TOP MANAGEMENT . . . . .        | 95 |



|                                                  |     |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----|
| AS PERCEIVED BY JOURNALISTS . . . . .            | 96  |
| AS PERCEIVED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC . . . . .     | 98  |
| 6. CONCLUSION . . . . .                          | 101 |
| LIST OF REFERENCES . . . . .                     | 106 |
| APPENDICES . . . . .                             | 110 |
| A. SAMPLE LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL . . . . .        | 111 |
| B. SAMPLE TOP MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE . . . . . | 112 |
| C. SAMPLE JOURNALIST QUESTIONNAIRE . . . . .     | 116 |
| D. SAMPLE GENERAL PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE . . . . . | 120 |
| ABSTRACT . . . . .                               | 124 |



## LIST OF TABLES

| Table                                                                                                                        | Page |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Demographic Data for Top Management Sample . . . . .                                                                      | 46   |
| 2. Demographic Data for Journalist Sample . . . . .                                                                          | 47   |
| 3. Demographic Data for General Public Sample . . . . .                                                                      | 49   |
| 4. Profiles of Typical Respondents . . . . .                                                                                 | 50   |
| 5. Definitions of Public Relations and Percentage<br>Selecting Each Definition . . . . .                                     | 53   |
| 6. Percentage Who Consider Practitioners Professionals<br>and the Practice a Profession . . . . .                            | 55   |
| 7. Mean Rankings of Occupations in Terms of<br>Perceived Prestige . . . . .                                                  | 56   |
| 8. Perceived Competence of Practitioners . . . . .                                                                           | 59   |
| 9. Degree to which Practitioners Are Perceived<br>by Top Management to Have Understood and<br>Met Company Needs . . . . .    | 60   |
| 10. Degree to which Practitioners Are Perceived<br>by Journalists to Have Understood and<br>Met Media Needs . . . . .        | 61   |
| 11. General Population Perception of Whether or Not<br>Practitioners Have Understood and Met<br>Respondents' Needs . . . . . | 62   |
| 12. Top Management Rating of Advice and Counsel<br>Received from Practitioners During<br>the Past Year . . . . .             | 63   |
| 13. Journalists' Rating of Information and Materials<br>Received from Practitioners During<br>the Past Year . . . . .        | 64   |
| 14. Top Five Strongest Points of Practitioners as<br>Perceived by Top Management . . . . .                                   | 65   |
| 15. Top Five Strongest Points of Practitioners<br>as Perceived by Journalists . . . . .                                      | 66   |



|     |                                                                                                          |    |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 16. | Top Five Strongest Points of Practitioners<br>as Perceived by General Public . . . . .                   | 67 |
| 17. | Top Five Weakest Points of Practitioners<br>as Perceived by Top Management . . . . .                     | 69 |
| 18. | Top Six Weakest Points of Practitioners<br>as Perceived by Journalists . . . . .                         | 70 |
| 19. | Top Five Weakest Points of Practitioners<br>as Perceived by General Public . . . . .                     | 71 |
| 20. | Percentage of Respondents Who Consider<br>Public Relations a Necessary Function . . . . .                | 72 |
| 21. | Percentage of Respondents Who Believe Good<br>Public Relations Is Based on Good Performance . . .        | 74 |
| 22. | Perceived Honesty of Practitioners . . . . .                                                             | 77 |
| 23. | Perceived Trustworthiness of Practitioners . . . . .                                                     | 77 |
| 24. | Perceived Ethics of Practitioners . . . . .                                                              | 77 |
| 25. | Opinion of Practitioners . . . . .                                                                       | 78 |
| 26. | Do Public Relations Practitioners Do Work Which Is<br>in Public Interest or Serves Public Welfare? . . . | 79 |
| 27. | Perceived Importance of Public Relations . . . . .                                                       | 80 |



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Public relations in America has never been renowned for its savory reputation. Since the time of the nation's first real public relations practitioner early in the twentieth century, men and women in public relations have had to struggle to improve the reputation of their own calling as they worked to improve the images of those who have employed or retained them.

J. A. R. Pimlott, an Englishman who visited the United States to study public relations, found the situation curious. "Why is it," Pimlott asked, "that the professed experts in creating healthy public relations for others have been unable to heal themselves?" (24:202). The popular answer among practitioners of public relations has been that the poor reputation of their vocation has been due to the incompetence and dishonesty of a tiny minority of their number. Many other answers have been advanced as well.

Work towards improving the image of public relations and its practitioners began in earnest during the 1920s, and over the years many different groups and individuals have sought to provide direction and leadership to the effort. All too often the attempts to provide public relations for public relations have dissolved into disagreements about how to proceed and in which direction.



And the image of public relations has continued to lag behind the importance of the practice.

During the mid-1960s, however, the gap began to close. Under the sponsorship of the Public Relations Society of America, a critical self-examination of public relations and an effort to enforce ethical standards in the practice began (7:671). And while the society's efforts were binding only on its members--a small fraction of the nation's more than 100,000 public relations practitioners--those efforts served to set the pace for the industry as a whole.

To be sure, a gap between the importance of public relations and the image of the function still exists. But the progress made towards closing the gap during the past decade is real. It has also given rise to increasingly serious deliberations among practitioners about whether or not the practice of public relations is a profession.

"Public relations . . . is about as close as it will be to becoming a full-fledged profession," wrote Charles S. Steinberg in 1975. "What prevents it from achieving the total status of a profession is that its practitioners are not licensed, as are doctors or lawyers, and no academic requirements are needed to begin practice" (29:9). Yet other qualified observers do not consider licensing a requisite of professions. John Marston, for example, lists eight characteristics which distinguish professions from mere skilled occupations:



1. A defined area of competence;
2. An organized body of knowledge of some consequence;
3. Self-consciousness;
4. Competence of entrants determined by controlled access;
5. Continuing education;
6. Support of research;
7. Aid in the education of replacements;
8. Independence (7:671).

To these, Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, authors of the most widely used college textbook on public relations, add the following:

1. Professional competence;
2. Recognition of obligations to others in the profession;
3. A dedication to serve, not injure, the public welfare (7:672).

Whether the practice of public relations possesses all these characteristics is a moot point. While most professions do have such characteristics, one far more basic test can be used to discriminate between a profession and a non-profession: what does the public consider the vocation in question to be?

Historian Eric F. Goldman wrote nearly three decades ago that a profession is what the general public considers to be a profession (11:23). According to Goldman, perception, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. So while public relations practitioners may debate among themselves the question of whether their vocation is considered a profession, it is not a jury of public relations practitioners which will decide the question. If one accepts Goldman's position, the practice of public relations can be considered a profession only if it is accepted as one by the real jury: the public relations practitioner's publics.

Based on Goldman's position that a profession is what the



public considers to be a profession, this thesis was undertaken to provide an answer, based on research, to the question of whether or not the practice of public relations is a profession. In addition, this thesis seeks to obtain and analyze other current perceptions of public relations and the public relations practitioner. The thesis is based upon a descriptive survey of three publics considered important to the public relations practitioner: senior corporate executives, working journalists, and members of the general public. The survey samples attitudes towards and opinions of public relations practitioners. Moreover, based on analysis of the data which resulted from the survey, this thesis seeks to sketch a composite picture of public relations and the public relations practitioner as perceived by their publics.

## THE PROBLEM

### Statement

How do senior corporate executives, working journalists and members of the general public perceive the public relations practitioner and the practice of public relations?

### Analysis

1. How do members of these three publics define public relations?
2. Do members of these three publics consider the practitioner a professional and the practice a profession?



3. How do members of these three publics rank the practitioner in terms of occupational prestige?

4. How do members of these three publics evaluate the effectiveness of the public relations practitioner?

5. What do members of these three publics consider the strongest and weakest points of the practitioner?

6. Do members of these three publics consider public relations a necessary function?

7. Do members of these three publics believe that good public relations is based on good performance?

8. How do members of these three publics rate the practitioner in terms of honesty and trustworthiness?

9. Do members of these three publics hold a positive, neutral or negative image of the practitioner?

10. Do members of these three publics consider that the practitioner does work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare?

11. What do members of these three publics believe about the importance of public relations: is it increasing, remaining about the same, or decreasing?

12. Is there a relationship between opinions of public relations practitioners and (a) age, (b) education, (c) work experience, (d) amount of contact with practitioners, or (e) other variables, in members of these three publics?



### Limitations

Aside from Chapter 2, which reviews the historical background of the reputation of public relations and public relations practitioners since the early twentieth century, this study is limited to a descriptive survey of samples drawn from the populations of senior corporate executives, working journalists and the general public and to analysis of the data resulting from the survey.

### Definitions

It may be that some of the confusion surrounding the reputation of public relations is related to the lack of a generally accepted definition of public relations. A review of any half dozen authoritative books on public relations will likely reveal six different definitions for the term, some of which have little in common with one another. A poll of any six public relations practitioners will likely produce similar results. If experienced practitioners cannot agree among themselves what public relations is, it is not surprising that others have difficulty in grasping the term and what it encompasses. Hence, this study assumes that public relations is what respondents to the survey say they believe it is. The term will be defined in Chapter 4, based upon the results of the survey.

To help place the term public relations in perspective,



following is a listing of some of the definitions currently applied to it, together with the source of each definition:

Effective Public Relations: the planned effort to influence opinion through socially acceptable performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication (7:4).

The International Public Relations Association: a management function, of a continuing and planned character, through which public and private organizations and institutions seek to win and retain the understanding, sympathy and support of those with whom they are or may be concerned--by evaluating public opinion about themselves, in order to correlate, as far as possible, their own policies and procedures, to achieve by planned and widespread information more productive cooperation and more efficient fulfillment of their common interests (7:5).

The British Institute of Public Relations: the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (7:6).

Public Relations News: the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (29:15).

Public Relations Principles, Cases and Problems: a social philosophy of management expressed in policies and practices, which, through two-way communication with its publics, strives to secure mutual understanding and goodwill (4:4).

Other definitions germane to this thesis are:

Public relations practitioner: any person who engages in the practice of public relations or is perceived by any respondent to the survey conducted for this thesis to engage in the practice of public relations.

Public relations counsel and public relations counselor: any person who provides advice on public relations to a person,



organization, or institution by whom or by which he is retained.



## Chapter 2

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although it is possible to trace the origins of public relations far back into antiquity, it was not until the early twentieth century that the practice of public relations in America had its practical beginnings.

At the turn of the century, magazines were America's pre-eminent entertainment medium, commanding a vast following. And it was through publications like the popular McClure's magazine that a group of investigative authors and journalists known as muckrakers began to challenge large corporations in the court of public opinion (27:266). The muckrakers' weapon was exposé and, outraged at the "public be damned" attitude of big business, they began to make it clear in their writings how the so-called robber barons of business were exploiting the common citizen (25:19). The result was a predictable wave of public protest which put American business on the defensive for the first time and set the stage for eventual government regulation and anti-trust legislation (29:28).

The first response by businessmen was to try to silence the muckrakers with legal action. When this failed, many larger corporations sought to silence the attacks on them from the press by



the judicious and calculated placement and withdrawal of advertising (7:72). Eventually, however, the more enlightened businessmen recognized that business could no longer operate in an atmosphere of total laissez-faire and that there were obligations which had to be assumed. These obligations involved both the public and the public media (29:28).

The railroads had been under heavy attack by the muckrakers, and they were among the first to try a new approach to the problem: a press bureau to tell their side of the story. According to Cutlip and Center, "Others took the cue and turned to the specialist who could tell the business story in the press, the newspaperman," and this marked the beginning of ex-newspapermen serving as interpreters for inarticulate corporations and institutions (6:48). But while the former newsmen may have been articulate, on the whole they had little understanding of the fundamental problems behind the conflict and tried to counter the muckraking with "whitewash and press agency" (7:74).

#### IVY LEE: A PIONEER

One of the most notable exceptions was Ivy Ledbetter Lee, a man generally regarded as the father of modern public relations. While working as a reporter, Lee began to wonder whether the policy of secrecy was a wise one for business. If publicity was being used so effectively by the muckrakers to smear business, Lee



reasoned, why could it not be used with equal effectiveness to explain and defend business? Lee believed it could, and in 1903 he quit his reporter's job and went into publicity work (11:6).

A would-be lawyer himself, Lee came to realize that the world needed new kinds of lawyers--not merely those who would defend clients in court but those who would advise clients on how to avoid trouble. He also recognized the parallel between a court of law and the court of public opinion, and he saw the need for advisors who could counsel clients on how to avoid trouble with the public (28:5). But at first businessmen paid little attention to Lee's contentions that their traditional policy of secrecy was failing, and Lee was forced to take whatever came along. Convinced that his was the right way, Lee bided his time and added to his meager assets by acting as a press agent for politicians and for a circus and by helping a group of bankers buy up rights of way (11:6).

Lee's first big break came in 1906 when he was hired to help with an imminent strike in the anthracite coal industry. In 1902 the coal owners had had a major strike and had been badly hurt by ignoring public opinion. In contrast, facing the 1906 strike they hired Lee and were persuaded by him to send out the following announcement:

The anthracite coal operators, realizing the general public interest in conditions in the mining regions, have arranged to supply the press with all possible information.



Statements from the operators will be given to the newspapers through Ivy L. Lee. He will also answer inquiries on this subject and supply the press with all matter that it is possible to give out (15:47).

Lee also took the opportunity to issue a "Declaration of Principles," which set the tone for the practice of publicity for many years and is still quoted as a standard of ethics by publicists. Lee's declaration read:

This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency; if you think any of our matter ought properly to go to your business office, do not use it. Our matter is accurate. Further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly, and any editor will be assisted most cheerfully in verifying directly any statement of fact. Upon inquiry, full information will be given to any editor concerning those on whose behalf an article is sent out. In brief, our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about. Corporations and public institutions give out much information in which the news point is lost to view. Nevertheless, it is quite as important to the public to have this news as it is to the establishments themselves to give it currency. I will send out only matter every detail of which I am willing to assist any editor in verifying for himself. I am always at your service for the purpose of enabling you to obtain more complete information concerning any of the subjects brought forward in my copy (15:48).

Thanks to Lee's efforts, the poor image of the coal industry improved markedly, and other businesses began to seek Lee out. He told his prospective clients that if corporations were to be understood it was necessary for them to become articulate, to



open their books and to take their cases directly to the people. Secrecy was the cause of suspicion, Lee said, and he would not be a press agent for his clients. He would not run to the press with good stories about his clients or use his influence to keep out bad stories about them. Instead, he would advise his clients what they could do to achieve genuine good will (7:75). Ray E. Hiebert, a scholar who has studied Lee, wrote:

There was little that was tricky about his advice. He was not a stunt man. He simply sold the common sense of a man who understood the social conditions, business economics, and the role of media in the democratic society in which he lived (28:9).

If the first stage of public relations was press agency, Ivy Lee's 1906 declaration, according to Eric Goldman, marked the emergence of a second stage. "The public was no longer to be ignored, in the traditional manner of business, nor fooled in the continuing manner of the press agent," Goldman wrote. "It was, Lee declared, to be informed" (11:8).

With his success in the coal industry as a stepping stone, in time Lee became the original public relations counsel for some of the largest corporations and wealthiest men in the world (28:9).

But if Lee was America's first true public relations practitioner, he was also among the first to suffer a poor image. There is ample evidence that Lee had a close working relationship with newspapers of the day, but at least some muckraking journalists saw him as a handmaiden to the rich. He was seen as a spokesman



for capitalism, and various magazine article titles called him the "minnesinger to millionaires," the "dog robber of the rich," or "his master's voice" (28:9). Upton Sinclair dubbed him "Poison Ivy," a term which plagued Lee the rest of his life, and crusading journalist George Creel--who was to become a powerful practitioner in his own right--called him a "poisoner of public opinion" (7:77).

Later, during the isolationism of the 1920s, Lee visited Russia and he was impressed. He took the radical position of advocating U.S. recognition of Russia's communist government, and this led to his being called a Soviet propagandist and a communist sympathizer. Finally, in what was perhaps the most disastrous misunderstanding about him, according to Hiebert, Lee's counseling for a German firm with U.S. ties caused him to be investigated (and cleared) in the 1930s by the House Un-American Activities Committee. When word of the investigation reached the newspapers, Lee "became the victim of one of the worst presses since the robber barons suffered at the hands of the muckrakers," according to Hiebert (28:11).

In his day, Lee was looked upon as the personification of public relations, and there can be no question that the attacks upon him--justified or not--did harm to the emerging reputation of public relations. Lee died four months after the headlines had labeled him a Nazi propagandist, and Hiebert commented in 1964 that "it has taken a long time to expose the myths and correct his own



public image, the work he did so well for many others" (28:12).

There is reason to wonder, however, whether the attacks on Ivy Lee did not set the tone for the perception of public relations for years to come.

At the time Lee was counseling corporate clients in 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. At the urging of George Creel--the man who labeled Lee a poisoner of public opinion--President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information (C.P.I.) to help mobilize public support for the war. He named Creel to head the committee. Creel said that what was needed was "a vast enterprise in salesmanship" to publicize American war aims and activities, and he gathered a corps of capable journalists and publicists to help him with the job (11:11). Goldman wrote of the C.P.I.:

The efflorescent Creel hastily set up an office in an old brick house across from the White House and proceeded to get under way a public relations campaign which dwarfed anything that American businessmen had ever imagined in its magnitude and its results. Within six months, the Committee's antennae were touching every man, woman and child in the United States. Within six months, North Dakota, a longtime center of isolation, was near the top of the list in volunteers; the draft, which many informed people had thought would provoke riots, was moving ahead with scarcely an incident; and morale was rising, or reducing itself to the point where thousands were cheering proposals to change the name of German measles to Liberty measles and sauerkraut to Liberty cabbage (11:12).

The enormous success of the C.P.I. was not lost on at least one young man who had joined forces with the committee and who was



to have great impact on public relations following the war. His name was Edward L. Bernays (7:86-87; 1:155).

#### EDWARD BERNAYS: P.R. COUNSEL

Bernays, who had come to the C.P.I. from a background in show business press agency, was deeply impressed by the effectiveness of the Committee for Public Information during the war, and he saw an opportunity to use similar techniques in behalf of private and corporate clients. When he opened his office in 1919, Bernays called his work "publicity direction" to suggest activities broader in scope than those of the traditional press agent (1:288).

Two years later, Walter Lippmann's classic Public Opinion was published. It impressed Bernays, but he complained that the Lippmann book was largely theoretical--like others on the subject--and that it applied few of its findings to everyday use. This prompted Bernays to write his own book, Crystallizing Public Opinion, and his book was published the following year (1:776). One of the book's most distinctive features was Bernays' development of a general theory of public opinion. It placed heavy emphasis on psychology, which Bernays--a nephew of Sigmund Freud--said provided the theoretical foundation underlying public relations. But the book was aimed chiefly to serve as a primer or general manual of procedures for practitioners. In addition, it carried Lee's analogy between law and public relations a step further by coining



the term "public relations counsel," which it described as a specialist in two-way communication (25:128-29). Goldman later wrote of the book:

The public relations counsel as described in Crystallizing Public Opinion marks the third stage in the evolution of public relations thought in the United States. The public was not to be fooled in the immemorial manner of the press agent. It was not merely to be informed according to the formula of Ivy Lee's 1906 "Declaration." The public was to be understood--understood as an intricate system of group relationships and by an expert with the technical equipment, the ethics and the social view associated with the lawyer, doctor or teacher. Public relations was to be a two-way street --and a street in a good neighborhood (11:19).

Bernays' book has been hailed as a landmark, the first book on practical public relations (7:88). But response to the book at the time it was published reflected the failure of public relations to win recognition as a profession or even a responsible vocation. Scholar Alan R. Raucher summarized the reviews this way:

Generally, reviewers considered the term "public relations" merely a euphemism for "press agent." The concept that two-way communications was a socially beneficial force even outside business was ignored as reviewers were mainly interested in the commercial application. Even the short but favorable review in Management and Administration equated "public relations counsel" with "press agent" and explained that because the book discussed methods for analyzing and modifying public opinion it might have useful suggestions for sales promotion. Bernays' book received the same interpretation, though with less approval, by the reviewer for The New York Times who suggested that the title "public relations counsel" might be accepted if the ethics and manners of press agents changed. The new functions stressed by Bernays were either ignored or denied (25:144).



The same year his book was published, Bernays became a pioneer in a different way by teaching the nation's first college course in public relations at New York University (7:88).

Increasingly, however, practitioners were being subjected to criticism in the 1920s. James Wright Brown, head of Editor & Publisher, spoke for many newsmen in 1925 when he wrote:

The function of any publicity man is to emphasize favorable news for his clients and to suppress unfavorable news. Such a man renders no service to the public interested in the truth. Publicity is a blatant fraud upon the public, and the publicity agent commits an outrage when he colors news to suit his client's wishes (15:300).

Bernays wrote that "almost a conspiracy of silence about public relations and publicity prevailed in the mass media" in the 1920s. Only newspaper and advertising trade publications discussed the subject at length, Bernays said, and most of what they said was negative. So Bernays took it upon himself to wage a continuing campaign of public relations for public relations (1:29).

To help win that battle, in the early 1920s Bernays and his wife began publishing Contact, a four-page house organ which aimed "to give a clear understanding of the scope and functions of the counsel on public relations" (1:289). It reprinted short magazine and newspaper articles which had bearing on Bernays' concept of public relations. Contact was published irregularly from 1922 through 1934, and Bernays said it was often cited in newspaper and magazine editorials, textbooks and other publications (1:28). It sought to provide evidence of professional status for



the public relations counsel. In contrast with Ivy Lee's declaration that his work was to be done in the open, Contact said the public relations counsel would not discuss the affairs of his clients or even reveal their identity because "his ethics in this are similar to the ethics binding the lawyer and the physician" (25:127).

Bernays' efforts notwithstanding, after World War I and continuing possibly into the middle 1930s, at least some public relations practitioners posed as omnipotent seers "whose cognitions required only a problem to be presented in order for its solution to be forthcoming," according to L. Roy Blumenthal (2:126). And some of the solutions were as exotic as the fees charged for them. This was never true for the majority of practitioners of the day, but Blumenthal said it accurately described so many of the more colorful people in the field that a public concept was established. (Blumenthal concluded that time has erased the image of the public relations practitioner as a soothsayer, but that this image has been replaced--also due to a minority of practitioners--by the image of the "high liver, big spender, playboy type" practitioner.) (2:126).

#### CONCERN WITH REPUTATION

Entry into public relations in the 1920s was not limited by any particular academic standards, and some practitioners who



sought professional status urged the creation of some kind of sanctioning institution. As early as 1923, R. H. Wilder and K. L. Buell saw the lack of adequate checks on the honesty and behavior of press agents as a hindrance to professional status, and by 1926 Roger Riis and Charles Bonner were actively promoting the establishment of a national association to purge the many "jackels" who tainted the field. They proposed that practitioners who refused to join or abide by the association's rules be ostracized by the press and business interests. A committee to professionalize public relations was announced at the March 23, 1927 meeting of the Advertising Club in New York. Bernays was named chairman of the committee, and Ivy Lee was also a member. But the other 11 members were all affiliated with corporations or trade associations, and other independent agents refused to support the committee. It died quietly almost as soon as it was born (25:138-139).

Through the remainder of the twenties--until the stock market crash in 1929--the acceptance of public relations was a seesaw affair. Reactions to public relations were seldom neutral. According to Bernays, it was "accepted in some quarters, misjudged or misunderstood in others as a euphemism for press agency, space-grabbing or Machiavellian shenanigans" (1:776).

The attitude of the press and the public notwithstanding, the stature of public relations practitioners with business was an important yardstick for measuring their success for it was upon



business that the practitioner depended for his livelihood. Whether practitioners "exploited the businessmen's desires to be modern and their anxieties about new conditions for which they were unprepared," as Raucher asserts, or simply filled a pressing need, the public relations practitioner's stature with business rose steadily through the twenties. During those years, top independent counselors were consulted by the chief operating officers of the largest corporations and many successful public relations practitioners rose to staff levels in business. Raucher pointed out, however, that the admission of practitioners to staff positions did not necessarily mean that they advised on fundamental policies; individual cases suggest, he said, that their role was confined to advising on "tact and tactics" (25:147-148). Nevertheless, it is clear that the growth of public relations was closely associated with the growth of business in the 1920s.

#### THE PRACTICE EXPANDS

The stock market crash and the Great Depression which followed played a significant role in the development of public relations. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected in 1932 at the height of the depression, was a man who understood public opinion as perhaps no president before him had. His New Deal programs depended heavily upon public support, and Roosevelt employed public relations to an unprecedented degree to help



garner that support. Scott Cutlip and Allen Center summarized the impact on public relations as follows:

Events flowing from the Depression and the New Deal brought home to every group the need for building informed public support. The New Dealers soon found that this was essential to pave the way for their radical reforms. Government public relations had its greatest expansion under Franklin Roosevelt. School administrators were made to realize the dangers of an uninformed public as hard-pressed taxpayers chopped off "the frills" in education. The Depression brought a tremendous expansion in social welfare needs and agencies. These administrators, too, came to realize the need for better public understanding. Military leaders, looking apprehensively at the build-up of the Nazi and Fascist war machines, began to promote support for more adequate armed forces. Colleges and universities, caught in the web of financial woes, turned more and more to public relations to win contributions and recruit students (7:93).

The ties between public relations and business were also strengthened during the 1930s, as business relied increasingly on public relations to help stem Roosevelt's criticisms and legislative reforms. Cutlip and Center commented that there was a marked trend away from occasional and defensive efforts and toward more positive and continuous programs which were executed by newly established public relations departments (7:93).

S. H. Walker and Paul Skylar, writing in Harper's Magazine in early 1938, summarized it this way:

For the past four years American business men have been making an unprecedented attempt to communicate with the public. As the managers of our industry, trade and finance, these men have been trying to justify themselves before their critics by defining and acknowledging their responsibilities; and they have been trying to convince the public that their stewardship of the nation's



business has been and will continue to be enlightened, productive and safe. In their own words, they have been trying to improve their "public relations," primarily by "selling business" to the people (35:111).

The same writers, in a later issue of Harper's Magazine the same year, reflected on the expanding role of public relations in the later 1930s:

The "public-relations director" of a corporation may be anything from a publicity hack to a top executive with broad authority, a general political and financial adviser whose influence extends over advertising and other technics (sic) of public influence. Nowadays, in the larger corporations at least, he is likely to be the latter. Likewise the independent firms of public-relations counsel are likely to exercise a very persuasive influence over the activities of the corporations they serve (36:434).

Bernays, his finger ever on the pulse of public relations, summarized the period as follows:

From 1930 to 1940, recognition of what we did expanded. The literature of public relations grew, university courses multiplied, and discussion in the lay trade and the professional press contributed to public understanding. Business increased its use of public relations, and the number of practitioners expanded (1:777).

#### FURTHER EXPANSION AND MATURATION

When the United States entered World War II in 1941, the government again led the way in public relations, this time with what has been called a "breath-taking demonstration of the power of an organized informational campaign" (7:94). The campaign was organized under the newly-created Office of War Information (O.W.I.) and directed by Elmer Davis, a veteran newsman, radio



commentator and historian. By comparison, the O.W.I. programs dwarfed those of George Creel's World War I Committee for Public Information. The new office began with a first year budget of nearly \$40 million, a quarter of which was spent on "information" for the United States and the remainder for "information" directed at overseas audiences. O.W.I. executives claimed that the office operated "not as a dictatorial Ministry of Propaganda, but only as an agency of a democratic government, supplementing the work of a free press and other free media" (12:32). The O.W.I., however, had responsibility for reviewing, coordinating and approving the war informational activities of all Federal departments and agencies, a charter which gave it virtual dictatorial power. With its bureaus and programs stretching around the world and its activities ranging from managing its own radio networks to issuing thousands of news releases, the O.W.I. was the most massive public relations apparatus the United States--and perhaps the world--had ever known. According to Cutlip and Center, "Davis and the O.W.I. set the pace for extensive expansion of public relations in the armed forces, in industry, and in allied fields" (6:60).

The decade brought further maturation of public relations. More than ever before in a similar period, public relations departments were established and thoughtful public relations programs--as distinguished from publicity programs--were undertaken by industry, non-profit institutions and government. Independent



public relations counseling firms multiplied, and major advertising agencies offered public relations counseling as well. Moreover, public relations gained increasingly in respectability, with new emphasis on research, a rapid increase in the number and scope of public relations courses offered by colleges and universities, and a vast increase in the number of books, articles and trade journals devoted to the practice (6:470-471).

Leila A. Sussman noted in 1948 that even as they practiced, public relations men were continually seeking to define their own role vis-a-vis their clients (31:703). J. A. R. Pimlott concluded in 1951 that:

. . . the public relations group has made dramatic progress during and since the war, but its evolution is still in a fluid phase. It is cohering but still inchoate. It is uncertain of itself. It is immature. Its place in management is ill-defined (24:21).

In 1952, Cutlip and Center reported increasing sensitivity to public relations for public relations during the 1940s. Writing by public relations practitioners during that decade concentrated heavily on the need for responsibility, maturity and training in public relations (6:472).

Toward this end, it was in 1948 that the Public Relations Society of America (P.R.S.A.) was formed from the merger of two groups of practitioners, one representing primarily practitioners on the east coast and the other primarily practitioners on the west coast. By the end of 1950, the P.R.S.A. had adopted a code



of ethics and was moving toward professionalization of public relations. It had about 3,000 members (6:475,486).

#### A PROFESSION?

As the decade of the 1940s ended, public relations practitioners were asking seriously whether or not public relations was a profession. In his memoirs, Bernays wrote that by 1945 public relations was well established as a profession (1:783). But perhaps a more realistic view was taken by Goldman, writing in 1948:

The unfortunate fact is that public relations has so far failed of (sic) complete acceptance as a profession. Universities teach it, dictionaries define it in a way easily admitting of professional status, men and women rely on it as they rely on their doctor or lawyer. Yet a profession, at bottom, is an occupation which the general public considers to be a profession, and the continuing efforts of skilled opinion experts like Bernays to have the field considered a profession is sufficient evidence of incomplete acceptance (11:23).

Cutlip and Center wrote that by 1951 "most of the foundation stones for a professional structure" had been put in place. They considered the foundation stones:

. . . a maturing concept that regards the practitioner as a counselor and communicator rather than a publicity agent, the growth of a valuable body of literature including professional journals, the maturing of strong professional organizations, adoption and machinery for enforcement of a code of ethics, and extension and improvement of training courses in universities and colleges (6:475).

Pimlott concluded in the early 1950s that public relations



was a long way from being a profession. He felt, however, that practitioners were beginning to feel as though they had a profession and that some important consequences were to come from the awareness of common interests and purposes that the feeling reflected. He explained:

A pattern is forming. There is a natural tendency toward synthesis and rationalization among men and women who share the same aspirations. Common problems are focused and discussed. Points of view develop. More attention is paid to ethical and technical standards. Leaders and organizers appear. All these processes can be seen in American public relations (in 1951) (24:10).

Yet Pimlott was also sensitive to the fact that early in the 1950s acceptance of public relations as a worthwhile and important function was far less than universal. One possible reason for this, he noted, was that the indifferent reputation of public relations stemmed from the incompetence and dishonesty of a minority of the nation's public relations practitioners. But he pointed out that "other professions carry lunatic and even dishonorable fringes without suffering much loss of esteem" (24:203). Pimlott suggested another answer:

Any attempt to improve the public relations of public relations starts with the serious handicap in the dislike . . . which most people have of being manipulated. They like it all the less when the manipulator is unknown to them, when they may be uncertain whether they are the object of his attentions, when they are ignorant of the interests for whom he is acting, and when they suspect that as a hired man he may have compromised his sincerity. Public relations practitioners cannot escape their share of the unpopularity attributed to themselves by lobbyists, political bosses, advertisers, and other artists in manipulation. It is doubtful if it will ever be entirely



eradicated. The most that in the short term they can hope to do is mitigate it (24:203).

Finally, Pimlott suggested main reasons why public relations had a mixed reputation:

(1) Public relations practitioners are identified with unworthy causes. (2) They are thought to use dishonest and other undesirable methods. (3) Some of their claims are thought to be "eyewash" (24:205).

The remainder of the 1950s was a comparatively quiet period for business and for public relations. Business prospered, and public relations grew in scope as well as in numbers of practitioners. As the decade ended, the number of American corporations advancing practitioners to vice presidential positions increased on the order of 50 per cent, and the Wall Street Journal observed that public relations had become one of the nation's fastest growing fields, with some 100,000 practitioners--an increase of 700 per cent in a decade (22:53).

Toward the end of the decade, Irwin Ross summarized the public relations practitioner's standing:

The vaguest malaise of the PR practitioner is perhaps the most general: the sense of undefined status which afflicts the PR practitioner to an extent unknown to other specialists in the communication arts. There was a time when the advertising man felt compelled to defend his contribution to the consumer's well being. However spurious the defense, it no longer seems necessary. Newspapermen used to be regarded as uncouth interlopers. These days they are welcomed at diplomatic dinners. But the PR man, despite the vast budgets often at his command, is still looked upon with widespread skepticism. There is more suspicion than knowledge of just how he operates; his very reputation as a clever manipulator tends to



frustrate his continual striving for professional recognition. It is a sorry frustration which accounts for much of the solemn rhetoric about the "mission" of public relations and for the small sputter of celebration every time another colleague ascends the corporate ladder to vice president (26:254).

#### GROWTH IN THE SIXTIES

In a 12-page special report on public relations in 1960, Business Week provided a comprehensive view of the practice as it related to business. The report said that among the top three hundred companies in the nation, 75 percent had public relations departments and that new corporate public relations departments were starting at the rate of 100 each year. Moreover, thousands of smaller companies employed public relations practitioners or used outside counsel. The report noted the rise in public relations counseling firms and estimated that U.S. companies would spend two billion dollars on public relations in 1960 (28:23).

One of the reasons given for the expansion of public relations in the sixties was the social responsibility of business. "Today the corporation has had to take on new roles such as educator, philanthropist, enlightened employer, and community citizen," said the Business Week report. "Once its only goal was to make as much money as possible" (28:23).

But for all its growth, public relations was also having problems in the early 1960s. One common complaint against



practitioners was that they often had only a spotty idea of the company's objectives, its industry and its economic standing. There were also complaints that practitioners failed to come to grips with the real problems, immersing themselves instead in pie-in-the-sky plans. Practitioners countered that management often didn't understand the role of public relations and that all too often management failed to let the public relations man know what was going on (28:29-40).

Another public relations sensitivity at the time was ethics. Business Week noted that just how far a practitioner would stretch his conscience often depended on his own and his client's ethical threshold. "Often," according to Business Week, "the practitioner has to walk a tightrope between what his client wants, what his conscience says, and what the media want" (28:41).

The growing pains of public relations in the 1960s also involved sensitivity to status. "In one form," the special report noted, "this comes out in the drive to get PR labeled a profession--even to assure professional status through state licensing of PR practitioners, as doctors, for example, are licensed" (28:42).

In the late 1960s, the first published surveys on the role and perception of public relations began to appear. In 1960, for example, McGraw Hill surveyed corporate managers, public relations executives, newspapermen, and radio-television broadcasters on their perceptions of public relations. The results showed that



public relations had become a "must" for corporate management and, in many cases, a "stepping stone to the very top." This survey also found that "radio and television people generally have a high regard for public relations people and are anxious to get their cooperation." Newspaper and magazine editors, according to the survey, often belittled and ridiculed public relations practitioners but many frankly admitted that they could not fill their business pages without the help of public relations. Many newsmen felt that public relations practitioners were journalists who had "sold out to Madison Avenue because of the almighty dollar," according to one account, "and that PR people would do almost anything to get their clients into print" (3:15). A second complaint was that many public relations practitioners were incompetent. An Editor & Publisher story on the survey said:

Some (practitioners) were described as hack newspapermen who couldn't make the grade. Others were rated as glad-handers whose only talent was picking up the tab for reporters at the press club bar. And there were enough cases of PR people handing out free tickets to newsmen, inviting newsmen on free junkets and of unusual Christmas largesse far beyond the seasonal generosity that indicates some PR people do try to buy favors (3:15).

In 1961, a survey of public relations practitioners found that increased management awareness, acceptance and recognition of public relations was considered the single most important development in public relations "in recent years" (19:46). The survey also found that practitioners perceived that:



--There was a trend on the part of management to relate public relations to balance sheets.

--Public relations was continuing to enjoy steady growth.

--Public relations budgets were holding steady or increasing slightly.

--The major problems in public relations were incompetence, poor performance, and ethics (19:46).

Another survey, this one in 1962 by the Program in Public Relations at Columbia University's School of General Studies, underscored the expanding role of public relations in industry. Responses from 182 corporations provided the following information:

--34 percent said the person in charge of public relations was a vice president.

--84 percent said the function of public relations was growing in importance.

--77 percent said the person in charge of public relations had access to management policy discussions.

Robert W. Miller, chairman of Columbia's program in public relations at the time, commented on the findings:

This represents a significant change in the role of corporate public relations over the last 15 years . . . The acceptance of public relations at the policy level within the corporation has come about largely within the past five years. The results of this survey show that the trend in this direction is rising sharply and that a very high percentage of corporations has already made public relations a part of the policy formulation process today. . . . Now the fact that in 34 percent of the corporations



reporting the person in charge of public relations is a vice president is highly significant. Ten years ago a vice president in charge of public relations was rare (30:39).

By 1967, the Public Relations Society of America had grown to 5,600 members and it estimated that the nation had a total of approximately one hundred thousand public relations practitioners, 60 percent of them on the staffs of business firms. In an essay on public relations that year, Time magazine said:

One result of this expansion is that the public relations business itself is badly in need of better public relations. Feelings about it range from occasional admiration to exaggerated alarm. . . . to the extent that they are aware of p.r.'s largely invisible operations, growing numbers of people suspect that they are being manipulated by hidden "image merchants." Sometimes the p.r. man is regarded as merely an inventor of gimmicks, the old fashioned pitchman or pressagent with pretensions. Sometimes he is regarded as a new creature with Big Brotherly skills in brainwashing. In fact, the good public relations man is more than a press-agent--though not even the best of them is ever wholly free of flackery--and considerably less than Big Brother. His calling contains more than its share of what the Nation long ago called "higher hokum." But it is also a legitimate and essential trade, necessitated by the complexity of modern life and the workings of an open society. It is growing today, says Harvard Government Professor Seymour Martin Lipset, because "there is even more direct communication between power and people" (32:40).

While the Time essay provided some examples of public relations operating in the public interest, it also noted how public relations could "offend, annoy and infuriate:"

Despite the excellence at the top of the profession, far too many p.r. men still think their chief function is to stage lunches, cocktail parties, junkets, cruises, screenings, no-news press conferences, and other non-events. Releases are fired off without regard for destination or deadline. Throughout the entire 16 weeks that



the New York Herald Tribune was struck in 1963, releases continued pouring into its offices--some of them by special messenger. This kind of p.r. work is not only wasteful, but it clogs communications where it is supposed to free them (32:41).

Identical surveys conducted in 1962 and 1968 among the nation's leading business and financial writers underscored the point. The editors thought there was less effort to provide a free flow of information in 1968 than in 1962. In the 1962 survey, 54 percent of the editors considered that practitioners provided a free flow of honest information, and the percentage dropped to 38 percent in 1968. Conversely, the editors' opinion of the competence of public relations practitioners rose slightly (7:426).

Perhaps the most comprehensive survey of public relations was the one undertaken in 1967 by Kenneth Henry and described in detail in his book Defenders and Shapers of the Corporate Image. A sociologist by profession, Henry examined public relations from a sociological perspective. He surveyed three separate groups: the "public relations manager" for each of the Fortune magazine top 500 corporations for 1966, a "general public relations sample" based on systematic random sampling of the P.R.S.A. (yielding a final sample of 490) and all bylined financial editors listed for daily newspapers of 20,000 or more circulation (yielding a final sample of 291 editors). The three samples totaled 1,281 individuals, and Henry received usable responses from between 42 and 45 percent of each of his three samples (14:52).



From Henry's survey, the following profile of the public relations practitioner of 1967 emerged:

--Slightly less than one in five of the corporate public relations managers was a corporate officer.

--Nearly half of all large corporation practitioners reported directly to the president or chairman of the board.

--Public relations and top management appeared to share equally in the definition, authorization, clearance and release of news.

--Practitioners believed that the public relations department was bypassed five percent of the time (or less) by reporters seeking direct access to top management. Nearly half the editors, however, said they often bypassed the practitioner to "go upstairs." More than nine out of ten of the corporate public relations managers--and almost as many in the public relations comparison group--said that management informed them of any media contacts outside ordinary channels.

--Practitioners tended to be left out of the early stages of top management planning and decision making. Only rarely was more than one-third of the practitioners invited to take part in top management policy and planning discussions. Yet three out of four of the large corporation practitioners said that management had at some time cancelled or changed a policy or major practice on the recommendation of the public relations manager.



--80 percent of the corporate practitioners found it necessary to spend some time in justifying the usefulness of their work to management.

--Almost half the practitioners (and 51 percent of the editors) considered public relations a profession. (Only 4 percent of the editors considered public relations men in general as "professionals," but more than 63 percent believed that large corporation public relations managers were "professionals.")

--More than three-fourths of the large corporation practitioners reported being treated as "a professional" by management, and over 90 percent of the independent counselors reported being treated as "a professional."

--Both corporation executives and public relations practitioners tended to rank practitioners higher in occupational prestige than did the editors. The executives and practitioners ranked practitioners ahead of accountants and reporters and below college professors, architects and economists. Editors ranked practitioners below all these occupational groups (14:156-162, 186).

#### PERCEPTIONS IN THE SEVENTIES

In 1972, a Time magazine survey of attendees at the P.R.S.A. convention found that 70 percent believed the press had a better understanding of the practice in 1972 than in 1967, the year of Henry's survey (33:43). Another survey showed that most public



relations practitioners believed their relationship with the press improved between 1967 and 1972 (34:43). But in a small survey of editors for large newspapers on "what bugs them most about public relations people," one surveyor found that by far the most frequent complaint was lack of knowledge of the newspaper business--whom to deal with, working schedules and deadlines, whom to see and when. An article on this survey concluded, "Newspapermen seem to feel they should disparage public relations people. And they feel they have reason to" (24:14, 46).

The disparity between the way newspapermen and public relations practitioners view public relations was illustrated strikingly by the results of a survey published in Public Relations Journal in 1973. More than 90 percent of the practitioners agreed with the statement, "Practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news." Fewer than half the reporters agreed. On the statement, "Practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion," 91 percent of the journalists agreed and 65 percent of the practitioners agreed. And on the statement, "Practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest, and making best use of space," only 39 percent of the journalists agreed while 89 percent of the practitioners agreed. On the survey, Public Relations Journal concluded:



It would be difficult to deny that the press is a desired public, or that public relations practitioners would prefer journalists to have positive attitudes toward them. If members of the public relations profession are concerned with the general receptivity of journalists to public relations practitioners and their products, this survey indicates that considerable work remains to be done in improving attitudes toward public relations held by people serving as gatekeepers in channels through which flows the information that shapes public opinion (21:25).

Because of the concern by many members of P.R.S.A. with the poor image of public relations, in late 1974 a resolution was passed by the society to create a special task force on public relations for public relations. In March 1975, the 35-member task force was formed under the chairmanship of Burns W. Lee, president of a Los Angeles counseling firm. The following November the special task force made its report, concluding that: (1) there was a pressing need for greater professionalism among practitioners and this was by far the most serious problem; (2) there was a wide disparity of opinion within P.R.S.A. as to what public relations practitioners really do and what public relations really means; (3) much of management did not understand or appreciate public relations; (4) media frequently were antagonistic and lacking in understanding of public relations, often considering practitioners as obstructionists, apologists, and cover-up experts; and (5) colleges and universities were not training future leaders of corporations and other institutions to understand and appreciate public relations (17:2-6). The special P.R.S.A. task force outlined an ambitious program for improving the image of public relations,



and at this writing that program is in the process of being implemented.



## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken to determine how senior corporation executives, working journalists and members of the general public perceive the public relations practitioner and the practice of public relations.

#### COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The data for this study were collected by means of a descriptive survey conducted during the months of June and July 1976 by mail. The survey used three different questionnaire forms: one for the top management sample, one for the journalist sample, and one for the general public sample. The three questionnaires were similar in scope and, for the most part, similar in wording. Survey samples were selected as follows:

##### Top management sample

Survey forms for the top management sample were addressed by name to the presidents of 400 corporations at various locations in the United States. Half the management survey forms were addressed to presidents of corporations numbered among the largest 500 corporations (in terms of net sales) in the nation. The remaining half were addressed to presidents of smaller corporations. Random sampling was not used.



### Journalist sample

Survey forms for the journalist sample were addressed by name to 400 working journalists, ranging from senior journalists such as executive editors of major magazines and major metropolitan newspapers to junior journalists such as reporters for smaller media. A total of 250 survey forms went to journalists employed in print media (including newspapers, magazines and wire services). The remaining 150 survey forms were addressed to journalists employed in electronic media (including radio, television and networks). Random sampling was not used.

### General public sample

Survey forms for the general public sample were addressed by name to 400 persons selected on a quasi-random basis from telephone directories from eight different communities across the United States. A sample of 50 persons from each of the eight communities was used. The communities ranged in size from less than 25,000 to more than 700,000 population. Median population for the communities was approximately 340,000 and mean population approximately 354,000. Each of the eight communities was in a different state from the others, and all geographical areas of the nation except Alaska were represented. Inasmuch as it was necessary to use telephone directories in lieu of city directories, it is likely that the general population sample is biased by being better educated and more affluent than the population at large.



## DESIGN SHORTCOMINGS

While it is hoped that this study provides some insight into attitudes toward and opinions of public relations and the public relations practitioner, the findings can be generalized only with very great care because it was not feasible to use random samples for the three publics represented in this study. In short, it cannot be claimed that the samples are truly representative of all top management, all working journalists, or the general population at large. Moreover, the response rate of approximately 25 percent further reduces the representativeness of the samples selected. Nevertheless, it is felt that the samples (and response rates) were sufficiently large to warrant at least some limited generalizability of the findings.

The questionnaires approached the subject of public relations in a straightforward manner. Because of the researcher's desire to obtain as much information as possible on a limited budget and in a questionnaire sufficiently short to make a reasonable return rate likely, no attempt was made to guard against acquiescence response.

## PRETESTING

Twenty copies of each of the three questionnaires were pretested approximately three weeks before the final questionnaires were mailed. Return rates for the pretest questionnaires were



sufficiently high (averaging 35 percent) to permit a conclusion that the questionnaires were reasonably clear and unambiguous. While some changes in format were made to facilitate treatment of the data, neither the thrust nor most of the language of the pretest questionnaires was changed in the final questionnaires.

#### TREATMENT OF THE DATA

Raw data from the returned questionnaires were transcribed onto punch cards and verified. The raw data were then processed by computer (utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program) to provide frequencies and cross tabulation of responses for every question to responses for every other question for each of the three questionnaires. The following refined data were provided by the computer analysis:

1. Frequency of selection for each possible response to each question on each of the three questionnaires.
2. Standard deviations, standard errors, ranges, variances, means, medians and modes for all questions which elicited interval data. Mode for all questions which elicited other than interval data.
3. Correlation coefficient and confidence level in the correlation for every possible combination of responses to questions which elicited interval data for each of the three samples.



## Chapter 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### RESPONSE RATES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Questionnaires were sent to a total of 1,200 persons, 400 of whom were in the top management category, 400 of whom were in the journalist category, and 400 of whom were in the general population category. A total of 297 usable questionnaires, or 24.75 percent of those mailed, was returned.

##### Top management sample

Return rates for the top management sample was 21 percent (87 usable questionnaires). The youngest respondent in this category was 32 years old and the oldest was 76, with mean and median age for respondents being 52. Formal education reported by the top management sample ranged from a low of 8 years to a high of 21 years, with mean and median education approximately 17 years. Management experience reported by respondents ranged from 7 to 50 years, with a mean of 22.9 years and a median of 21.1 years. The smallest company represented in the top management sample had about 70 employees and the largest approximately 900,000, with a sample mean of 32,900 employees and a median of about 8,000 employees. Annual sales for respondents' companies ranged from a low of about \$2,000,000 to



a high of approximately \$5,500,000,000; mean sales were approximately \$1,170,000,000 and median sales approximately \$650,000,000. Some 30 percent of the top management respondents reported working for companies with annual sales between \$1,000,000,000 and \$5,000,000,000. Of the top management respondents, 52 percent were presidents of their corporations, and the remaining respondents held positions as chairman and president, chairman, senior or executive vice president, or "other." Responses from respondents whose questionnaires indicated that they may work chiefly in public relations and from respondents whose titles indicated that they are not company officers or directors (other than one listed as assistant to the chairman and another listed as assistant to the president) were disallowed. Table 1 contains specific demographic data for the top management sample.

#### Journalist sample

Return rate for the journalist sample was 35.75 percent or 143 usable questionnaires. The youngest respondent in this sample was 22 years of age and the oldest 84, with a mean age for respondents of 43 and a median age one year younger. Formal education for the journalist sample ranged from a low of 11 years to a high of 20 years, with both mean and median falling just above 16 years. Experience in news media work ranged from a low of 1 year to a high of 63 years, with a mean of 20 years and a median just below that. Over 52 percent of the sample reported



Table 1

## Demographic Data for Top Management Sample

## AGE (in years)

---

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Youngest respondent . . . . . | 32 |
| Oldest respondent . . . . .   | 76 |
| Mean . . . . .                | 52 |
| Median . . . . .              | 52 |

## EDUCATION (in years)

|                           |      |
|---------------------------|------|
| Least education . . . . . | 8    |
| Most education . . . . .  | 21   |
| Mean . . . . .            | 16.8 |
| Median . . . . .          | 16.9 |

## MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE (in years)

|                            |      |
|----------------------------|------|
| Least experience . . . . . | 8    |
| Most experience . . . . .  | 50   |
| Mean . . . . .             | 22.9 |
| Median . . . . .           | 21.1 |

## POSITION OF RESPONDENTS

|                                              |     |
|----------------------------------------------|-----|
| Chairman and president . . . . .             | 13% |
| Chairman . . . . .                           | 6   |
| President . . . . .                          | 52  |
| Senior or executive vice president . . . . . | 15  |
| Other . . . . .                              | 14  |

## COMPANY ANNUAL SALES

|                   |               |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Minimum . . . . . | \$2,000,000   |
| Maximum . . . . . | 5,500,000,000 |
| Mean . . . . .    | 1,170,000,000 |
| Median . . . . .  | 650,000,000   |

## NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN COMPANY

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| Minimum . . . . . | 70      |
| Maximum . . . . . | 900,000 |
| Mean . . . . .    | 32,864  |
| Median . . . . .  | 8,001   |

## PRIMARY BUSINESS OF COMPANY

|                                           |       |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|
| Manufacturing consumer goods . . . . .    | 25.3% |
| Manufacturing industrial goods . . . . .  | 31.3  |
| Wholesale sales or distribution . . . . . | 9.6   |
| Retail sales . . . . .                    | 7.2   |
| Other . . . . .                           | 26.6  |

---



being employed by newspapers at the time of the survey, and another 29.4 percent reported being employed by television stations. The remainder were employed by magazines, radio stations, and networks.

Table 2

## Demographic Data for Journalist Sample

---

|                                                     |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------|
| AGE (in years)                                      |       |
| Youngest respondent . . . . .                       | 22    |
| Oldest respondent . . . . .                         | 84    |
| Mean . . . . .                                      | 43    |
| Median . . . . .                                    | 42    |
| EDUCATION (in years)                                |       |
| Least education . . . . .                           | 11    |
| Most education . . . . .                            | 20    |
| Mean . . . . .                                      | 16.2  |
| Median . . . . .                                    | 16.2  |
| NEWS MEDIA EXPERIENCE (in years)                    |       |
| Least experience . . . . .                          | 1     |
| Most experience . . . . .                           | 63    |
| Mean . . . . .                                      | 20    |
| Median . . . . .                                    | 19.7  |
| POSITION OF RESPONDENTS                             |       |
| Editor (various types) . . . . .                    | 46.2% |
| News director . . . . .                             | 30.8  |
| Specialized writer . . . . .                        | 11.2  |
| Reporter . . . . .                                  | 4.9   |
| Correspondent . . . . .                             | 1.4   |
| Other . . . . .                                     | 5.6   |
| TYPE AUDIENCE                                       |       |
| Small community . . . . .                           | 8.4%  |
| Large city or metropolitan area . . . . .           | 43.4  |
| Major part of state or entire state . . . . .       | 16.8  |
| Large region including two or more states . . . . . | 18.2  |
| National or international . . . . .                 | 13.3  |

---

Altogether, 63 percent of the journalist respondents were



employed by what is commonly known as the writing press and 37 percent by electronic media. Editors of various types comprised about 46 percent of the journalist sample and radio and television news directors another 31 percent. The remainder of the respondents were reporters, specialized writers, correspondents, and "other," which included columnists, producers, anchormen, and assistant news directors, among others.

Specific demographic data for the journalist sample are presented in Table 2.

#### General public sample

Return rate for the general public sample was 17.5 percent or 70 questionnaires. The youngest respondent in this category was 23 years old and the oldest was 69, with respondents' mean age being 43.6 and median age 44. Formal education for the general population sample ranged from a low of 3 years to a high of 22 years, with mean education falling at 14.7 years and median education at 15.6. Respondents live in communities ranging in size from 10,000 population to about 2,000,000, with a mean population for the sample of approximately 350,000 and a median population of approximately 125,000. Some 81 percent of the general public sample reported themselves "now working," and the largest single group (25 percent) reported their usual jobs as "management."

Table 3 contains specific demographic data for the



general public sample.

Table 3

Demographic Data for General Public Sample

---

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| AGE (in years)                   |           |
| Youngest respondent . . . . .    | 23        |
| Oldest respondent . . . . .      | 69        |
| Mean . . . . .                   | 43.6      |
| Median . . . . .                 | 44        |
| EDUCATION (in years)             |           |
| Least education . . . . .        | 3         |
| Most education . . . . .         | 22        |
| Mean . . . . .                   | 14.7      |
| Median . . . . .                 | 15.7      |
| OCCUPATION                       |           |
| Unskilled labor . . . . .        | 5.9%      |
| Skilled labor or trade . . . . . | 14.7      |
| Office work . . . . .            | 7.4       |
| Sales . . . . .                  | 8.8       |
| Management . . . . .             | 25.0      |
| Teaching . . . . .               | 4.4       |
| Other professional . . . . .     | 17.6      |
| Other . . . . .                  | 16.2      |
| HOME COMMUNITY POPULATION        |           |
| Smallest community . . . . .     | 10,000    |
| Largest community . . . . .      | 2,000,000 |
| Mean . . . . .                   | 347,379   |
| Median . . . . .                 | 125,500   |

---

Typical respondents

Because of the wide variability of respondents within each of the three samples, generalizing about the demographics is difficult. Nevertheless, to provide the reader with a simplified profile of the typical respondent within each of the sample groups, demographic data were analyzed and median values extracted.



Wherever a median value was not available because of the lack of interval data, a mode value was used in its place. Based on this, typical respondents are profiled in Table 4.

Table 4

### Profiles of Typical Respondents

#### TOP MANAGEMENT

|                                 |                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Position . . . . .              | President       |
| Company business . . . . .      | Manufacturing   |
| Company size . . . . .          | 8,000 employees |
| Company annual sales . . . . .  | \$650,000,000   |
| Age . . . . .                   | 52 years        |
| Formal education . . . . .      | 16.9 years      |
| Management experience . . . . . | 21.1 years      |

#### JOURNALIST

|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Position . . . . .         | Editor     |
| Type media . . . . .       | Newspaper  |
| Type audience . . . . .    | Large city |
| Age . . . . .              | 42 years   |
| Formal education . . . . . | 16.2 years |
| Media experience . . . . . | 19.7 years |

#### GENERAL PUBLIC

|                                |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Occupation . . . . .           | Management |
| Community population . . . . . | 125,000    |
| Age . . . . .                  | 44 years   |
| Formal education . . . . .     | 15.6 years |

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA BY SUBPROBLEM

#### Defining public relations

The first subproblem asks how top management, journalists and the general public define public relations. To answer this, respondents were asked on each questionnaire to select 1 of 8 alternative definitions offered for public relations.



Only in the top management sample was there any unanimity as to a definition for the term. More than half the top management respondents agreed that public relations is "winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance." Of the alternatives, this definition is one the majority of public relations practitioners would likely find most acceptable as well, so it would appear that practitioners and top management view the role of public relations similarly, for the most part. The top management sample selected "influencing public opinion through two-way communications" as the next most popular definition (although this definition received only about one-third as many selections as the first choice); this is another of the definitions which would likely be acceptable to most public relations practitioners. Altogether, nearly three-fourths of the top management respondents selected one of these two definitions, an unusually high degree of agreement on the meaning of the term public relations.

Like the top management sample, the general public sample chose "winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance" as the most popular definition, but by a much narrower margin; fewer than one-fourth of the respondents made this selection. The second most popular definition for the general public was "promoting a person, product, idea or institution;" this definition was selected by slightly more than one-fifth of the respondents. Another 14 percent of the general



public sample considered public relations to be "promoting rapport or goodwill," and nearly as many selected "manipulating public opinion" as the best definition. In the general public sample, there was little agreement about the meaning of the term public relations.

Nearly 30 percent of the journalist sample defined public relations as "promoting a person, product, idea or institution," and another 17 percent defined it as "influencing public opinion through publicity." Moreover, almost 11 percent of the journalist respondents saw public relations primarily as "press agency, propaganda and lobbying." Based on this, it would appear that for the most part journalist respondents do not perceive public relations chiefly as a two-way communications function. Significantly, however, over 16 percent of the journalists agreed with the majority of the top management sample that public relations is "winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance."

From the data, it appears that top management perceives the full spectrum of public relations with more clarity than does either of the other two groups. The journalist sample seems to perceive public relations chiefly as a one-way communications function (from management to public) in which news media serve as a principal channel. The general public sample is substantially more fragmented (and, presumably, more confused) about the meaning of public relations than is either of the other two



groups.

Table 5 provides tabular data on selection of definitions.

Table 5

Definitions of Public Relations and Percentage  
Selecting Each Definition

| <u>Definition Selected</u>                                                     | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance . . . . . | 54.1%                     | 16.6%                    | 23.1%                     |
| Influencing public opinion through publicity . . . . .                         | 3.5                       | 17.3                     | 11.6                      |
| Influencing public opinion through two-way communications . .                  | 17.6                      | 9.3                      | 8.7                       |
| Promoting a person, product, idea or institution . . . . .                     | 10.6                      | 29.3                     | 20.3                      |
| Promoting rapport or goodwill . . . . .                                        | 5.9                       | 4.7                      | 14.5                      |
| Making people thing something is better (or worse) than it really is . . . . . | 3.5                       | 6.7                      | 13.0                      |
| Manipulating public opinion . . . . .                                          | 4.7                       | 6.0                      | 13.0                      |
| Press agentry, propaganda and lobbying . . . . .                               | 3.5                       | 10.7                     | 5.8                       |

Professionalism and professions

The second subproblem asks whether top management, journalists and the general public consider the public relations practitioner a professional and the practice a profession. To deal with this subproblem, respondents were asked (1) whether they



considered public relations people to be professionals in the sense that doctors, lawyers and engineers are professionals, and (2) whether they considered the practice of public relations to be a profession in the sense that the practice of medicine or law is a profession.

All three samples answered negatively to the two questions, but the negative responses given by the general public were not as numerous proportionally as those given by the other two samples. The journalist respondents, by almost a 4-to-1 margin, said that the public relations practitioner is not a professional and the practice is not a profession. One journalist, perhaps speaking for some of his more inhibited colleagues as well as for himself, underscored his negative answer and added: "Emphatically!" Top management respondents said by almost a 2-to-1 margin that practitioners are not professionals and by slightly more than a 4-to-1 margin that the practice of public relations is not a profession. The general population sample, however, was close to evenly divided on the question of professionalism; 45.5 percent of the respondents said they considered public relations practitioners professionals, and 54.5 percent said they did not. On the question of whether or not the practice of public relations is a profession, about 38 percent of the general public sample answered yes and about 62 percent no.

If one accepts Goldman's position that a profession is, at bottom, an occupation which the general public considers to be a



profession, this study provides evidence that the practice of public relations has not attained the status of profession (11:23). Moreover, the study also provides evidence that the public relations practitioner is not widely accepted as a professional.

Table 6 provides specific percentages of respondents who consider the practice of public relations a profession and who consider the public relations practitioner a professional.

Table 6

Percentage Who Consider Practitioners Professionals  
and the Practice a Profession

|                                                                    | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Public relations practitioners<br>considered professionals . . . . | 31.3%                     | 21.6%                    | 45.5%                     |
| Practice of public relations<br>considered a professional . . .    | 26.5                      | 21.2                     | 37.9                      |

### Occupational prestige

The third subproblem asks how top management, journalists and members of the general public rank the public relations practitioner in terms of occupational prestige. To provide a measure of the practitioner's occupational prestige, the questionnaires asked respondents to rank eight different occupations in terms of occupational prestige. To minimize confusion, the instructions read, "Place 1 by the best, 2 by the second best, 3 by the third best, etc.," because pretest questionnaires had indicated some



confusion about the ranking question. In spite of the added instructions, the question apparently proved too confusing (or perhaps too taxing) for many respondents; 12 top management respondents (14.2 percent), 31 journalist respondents (21.7 percent), and 15 general public respondents (21.4 percent) failed to answer the question completely. Based on responses from those who did complete the question, however, Table 7 provides mean rankings in terms of occupational prestige.

Table 7

Mean Rankings of Occupations in Terms of  
Occupational Prestige

| <u>Occupation</u>                  | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Lawyer . . . . .                   | 1                         | 1                        | 1                         |
| Accountant . . . . .               | 2                         | 2                        | 2                         |
| Department store manager . . . . . | 3                         | 5                        | 4                         |
| High school teacher . . . . .      | 4                         | 3                        | 3                         |
| Public relations man . . . . .     | 5                         | 6                        | 6                         |
| Newspaper reporter . . . . .       | 6                         | 4                        | 5                         |
| Real estate salesman . . . . .     | 7                         | 7                        | 7                         |
| Used car salesman . . . . .        | 8                         | 8                        | 8                         |

From the data, it seems clear that respondents in the top management sample perceive public relations as being higher in occupational prestige than do those in the journalist sample and the general public sample. For all samples, the practitioner falls below lawyers, accountants, department store managers and high school teachers in occupational prestige and above real estate salesmen and used car salesmen. The top management sample



ranked the practitioner just ahead of the newspaper reporter, but the general public ranked the practitioner just below the newspaper reporter. As might have been expected, the journalist sample ranked the newspaper reporter higher than it did the practitioner.

There was a wide range of opinions in ranking practitioners in occupational prestige. In the top management sample and the journalist sample, practitioners were ranked by individuals as high as second and as low as eighth. In the general public sample, the practitioners' rankings ranged from a high of first to a low of seventh.

Although not all the same occupations were used in both studies and the two studies had different types of samples, these results are not inconsistent with Henry's findings on the practitioner's occupational prestige (14:186).

#### Perceived effectiveness

The fourth subproblem asks how top management, journalists and the general public evaluate the effectiveness of the public relations practitioner. Attempting to measure the practitioner's effectiveness as perceived by respondents involved two questions asked of all three groups and variations on two additional questions asked of the three groups.

The first question, and the simplest of the four, asked respondents whether they believe that public relations people generally do a good job. Just over half the respondents in the



top management sample and the journalist sample replied that they believe practitioners generally do a good job. Because interface between members of the general public and public relations practitioners is limited, the general public questionnaire offered a "don't know" option on this question, and nearly 30 percent of the respondents selected this option. Of the general public respondents who answered the question otherwise, 63 percent said they believe practitioners generally do a good job. In summary, it is apparent that a sizable proportion of the people surveyed in this study--but not a clear majority--believe that public relations people generally do a good job.

The next question dealt with the perceived competence of public relations practitioners. It asked, "Judging from your experience with public relations people during the past year, what do you think of the competence of public relations people?" As shown in Table 8, practitioners were rated as "competent" by a wide margin, though a large percentage of the general public sample reported no experience with public relations people (during the past year).

To help evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the practitioner, a question on the top management questionnaire asked to what extent public relations people employed or retained by respondents' companies during the past year had understood and met the needs of the company. (Nearly 1 out of 5 of the top management respondents indicated in response to this question that



Table 8

## Perceived Competence of Practitioners

| <u>Practitioners considered:</u> | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Highly competent . . . . .       | 3.7%                      | 0.7%                     | 3.0%                      |
| Competent . . . . .              | 64.2                      | 71.2                     | 45.5                      |
| Less than competent . . . . .    | 21.0                      | 26.0                     | 24.2                      |
| No experience w/practitioners .  | 11.1                      | 1.4                      | 27.3                      |

no practitioners were employed or retained; this, in itself, is not surprising, however, since more than 20 percent of the top management sample reported being associated with companies with annual sales of less than \$20,000,000, and such companies often do not employ or retain public relations practitioners.) Responses to this question showed that over two-thirds of the top management respondents whose companies employed or retained practitioners during the past year felt that the practitioners "usually" or "consistently" understood and met the company's needs. Inasmuch as top management has the power to hire and fire, however, it is surprising that as many top management respondents as 29.5 percent of those employing or retaining practitioners would accept practitioners who understood and met company needs only "sometimes" or "seldom." Significantly, none of the top management respondents said that practitioners had "never" understood or met company needs.

Table 9 provides a breakdown of the data on the degree to which practitioners are considered by top management respondents



to have understood and met the needs of their companies.

Table 9

Degree to which Practitioners Are Perceived  
by Top Management to Have Understood and  
Met Company Needs

| <u>Description</u>                                              | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> | <u>Percentage Who<br/>Use Practitioners</u> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Have consistently understood<br>and met company needs . . . . . | 15.5%                         | 19.1%                                       |
| Have usually understood and<br>met company needs . . . . .      | 41.7                          | 51.5                                        |
| Have sometimes understood and<br>met company needs . . . . .    | 21.4                          | 26.5                                        |
| Have seldom understood or<br>met company needs . . . . .        | 2.4                           | 3.0                                         |
| Have never understood or<br>met company needs . . . . .         | 0.0                           | 0.0                                         |
| No practitioners employed or<br>retained by company . . . . .   | 19.0                          | ----                                        |

To help obtain a measure of the perceived effectiveness of the practitioner, the journalist questionnaire asked, "Have public relations people with whom you have worked during the last year understood and met your organization's needs?" More than 40 percent of the respondents indicated that practitioners had "usually" understood and met their needs, and an identical number indicated that practitioners had "sometimes" understood and met their needs. Nearly 10 percent said that practitioners had



"seldom" understood or met their needs. Table 10 provides a breakdown.

Table 10

Degree to which Practitioners Are Perceived  
by Journalists to Have Understood and  
Met Media Needs

| <u>Description</u>                                       | <u>Percentage</u> |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Have consistently understood and met our needs . . . . . | 3.5%              |
| Have usually understood and met our needs . . . . .      | 41.3              |
| Have sometimes understood and met our needs . . . . .    | 41.3              |
| Have seldom understood and met our needs . . . . .       | 9.8               |
| Have never understood and met our needs . . . . .        | 0.0               |
| No dealings with practitioners . . . . .                 | 4.2               |

The general public sample was asked whether public relations people had understood their needs, and while nearly one-third of the respondents indicated that they had not dealt with any public relations people, of those who had dealt with practitioners, more than 70 percent reported that practitioners had understood and met their needs. This means that of those who dealt with public relations people, respondents considering



that practitioners have met their needs outnumbered respondents who considered that practitioners have not met their needs by a 2-to-1 margin. Precise percentages are provided in Table 11.

Table 11

General Population Perception of Whether or Not  
Practitioners Have Understood and Met  
Respondents' Needs

| <u>Description</u>                                                                             | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> | <u>Percentage Dealing<br/>with Practitioners</u> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Public relations people I have<br>dealt with have understood and<br>met my needs . . . . .     | 47.8%                         | 71.1%                                            |
| Public relations people I have<br>dealt with have not understood<br>and met my needs . . . . . | 19.4                          | 28.9                                             |
| I have not dealt with public<br>relations people . . . . .                                     | 32.8                          | ----                                             |

As another measure of the effectiveness of the practitioner, top management sample respondents were asked to rate the advice and counsel they received from practitioners during the past year. Nearly half of those who received advice or counsel from practitioners rated it as "usually" correct and dependable, and another 18.6 percent rated the advice and counsel as "consistently" correct and dependable. This means that nearly 7 out of 10 of the top management respondents consider that they receive good advice and counsel from their practitioners. Thirty percent



of those with practitioners, however, considered the advice and counsel from practitioners as only "sometimes" correct and dependable. Details are given in Table 12.

Table 12

Top Management Rating of Advice and Counsel  
Received from Practitioners During  
the Past Year

| <u>Description</u>                               | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> | <u>Percentage Dealing<br/>with Practitioners</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Consistently correct<br>and dependable . . . . . | 15.5%                         | 18.6%                                            |
| Usually correct and dependable . .               | 40.5                          | 49.1                                             |
| Sometimes correct and dependable .               | 25.0                          | 30.4                                             |
| Seldom correct or dependable . . .               | 2.4                           | 2.9                                              |
| Never correct or dependable . . .                | 0.0                           | 0.0                                              |
| No advice or counsel received . .                | 15.5                          | ----                                             |

In a similar question, journalists were asked to rate the information and materials they received from practitioners during the past year. Almost 60 percent of the journalists considered the information and materials they received from practitioners to be "usually" correct and dependable, though another 30 percent rated the information and materials as "sometimes" correct and dependable. Small proportions of the journalists sample rated the information and materials as either "consistently" or



"seldom" correct and dependable. Details are provided in Table 13.

Table 13

Journalists' Rating of Information and Materials  
Received from Practitioners During  
the Past Year

| <u>Description</u>                             | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Consistently correct and dependable . . . . .  | 3.5%                          |
| Usually correct and dependable . . . . .       | 58.2                          |
| Sometimes correct and dependable . . . . .     | 30.5                          |
| Seldom correct and dependable . . . . .        | 5.0                           |
| Never correct and dependable . . . . .         | 0.0                           |
| No information or materials received . . . . . | 2.8                           |

In summary, it can be concluded that a majority of the respondents in all three sample groups consider the public relations practitioner to be reasonably effective. Of the three groups, it is clear that the top management sample holds the highest opinion of the effectiveness of the practitioner. This, of course, was to be expected, since the practitioner works for top management and, presumably, tries to do a useful job for top management.

Strongest and weakest points

The fifth subproblem asks what top management, journalists and the general public consider the strongest and weakest points of public relations practitioners. To obtain this information,



each questionnaire asked directly what the respondent considered the strongest point of practitioners and the weakest point of practitioners. Each of these questions was followed by a series of alternative answers.

The most frequently selected strong point by the top management respondents was "gaining news media and/or public understanding for the company;" this was chosen by about one-fourth of the respondents. About one-fifth of the top management respondents selected "middleman between management and the public" and almost as many selected "ability to properly counsel management." In addition to being a measure of the top management sample's perception of the practitioner's strongest points, responses to this question could possibly be considered a reflection of the manner in which respondents use their public relations people and what they expect of the practitioner. Table 14 provides a breakdown of the top 5 responses to this question.

Table 14

Top Five Strongest Points of Practitioners as  
Perceived by Top Management

| <u>Perceived Strongest Point</u>                        | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Gaining news media and/or public understanding. . . . . | 25.6%                         |
| Middleman between management and the public . . . . .   | 20.9                          |
| Ability to properly counsel management. . . . .         | 18.6                          |
| Ability to interpret complex information for public . . | 17.4                          |
| Honesty, trustworthiness and candor . . . . .           | 11.6                          |



For the most part, the journalist sample perceives the practitioner's strongest point as being directly tied to news media assistance. More than 40 percent of the journalists considered the practitioner's "ability to provide information" (presumably to journalists) as being his strongest point. All of the other choices made on this question by a sizable proportion of the journalist sample seem to indicate that the journalist sees the practitioner chiefly as a channel through which he can obtain assistance. Table 15 provides a breakdown of the top 5 responses to this question.

Table 15

Top Five Strongest Points of Practitioners  
as Perceived by Journalists

| <u>Perceived Strongest Point</u>                       | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Ability to provide information . . . . .               | 43.9%                         |
| Middleman between management and media . . . . .       | 14.2                          |
| Gaining access to officials for media representatives  | 13.5                          |
| Ability to interpret complex information for media . . | 9.4                           |
| Understanding and providing for news media needs . . . | 9.4                           |

Information from the general public sample on the strongest point of practitioners was substantially more fragmented than that from the other two samples, and most likely this is a reflection of the poorer understanding the general public sample has of the nature of public relations. In addition, the lower exposure of the general public sample to public relations



practitioners is no doubt partly responsible for the fragmentation. The largest single percentage of the general public sample (21 percent) selected "middleman between management and the public," but almost as many selected "ability to interpret complex information for newsmen and/or the public." The top five choices are shown in Table 16.

Table 16

Top Five Strongest Points of Practitioners  
as Perceived by General Public

| <u>Perceived Strongest Point</u>                        | <u>Overall Percentage</u> |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Middleman between management and public . . . . .       | 21.0%                     |
| Ability to interpret complex information for public . . | 17.1                      |
| Gaining understanding for businesses . . . . .          | 14.3                      |
| Ability to provide information . . . . .                | 12.9                      |
| Advising management . . . . .                           | 10.0                      |

When asked to pinpoint the public relations practitioner's single weakest point, the largest proportion of the top management sample selected "lack of understanding of company or industry." Thirty-eight percent of the top management sample selected this alternative, and about half as many saw the practitioner's weakest point as "failure to comprehend the needs of management." It would seem that what the top management sample may be saying here is that while the practitioner may be capable within his own technical specialty, for the most part he lacks the broader understanding necessary to place matters in the proper perspective



(as far as top management is concerned). Obviously, it is imperative that the senior corporate public relations practitioner have a thorough understanding of his company and its industry and that he develop a perceptive understanding of the needs of management if he is to be truly effective in his work. It may be precisely because in many cases the practitioner lacks this perspective that he does not properly counsel management. (It would be naive, of course, to believe that these problems are peculiar to the public relations practitioner; in fact, top management would likely voice similar complaints about engineers, attorneys, accountants, and other specialists within the corporate community.)

It is surprising that the top management sample in just over 10 percent of the cases has cited "lack of honesty, trustworthiness or candor" as the fourth-ranking weakest point of practitioners. Whether respondents selecting this alternative doubt the honesty, the trustworthiness or the candor of the practitioner (or perhaps all three) is a moot point.

As the fifth ranking weak point, the top management sample selected "other" and listed a number of perceived weak points of practitioners. Among these were:

--"Promoting too many 'make work' projects not truly beneficial to the company."

--"Drink too much."

--"Tend to exaggerate."



--"Failure to anticipate problems and warn management."

--"Failure to understand people."

--"General incompetence."

--"Some just aren't smart enough."

A breakdown of the percentages of responses by top management respondents to this question is provided in Table 17.

Table 17

Top Five Weakest Points of Practitioners  
as Perceived by Top Management

| <u>Perceived Weakest Point</u>                         | <u>Overall Percentage</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Lack of understanding of company or industry . . . . . | 38.1%                     |
| Failure to comprehend needs of management . . . . .    | 20.3                      |
| Failure to properly counsel management . . . . .       | 11.9                      |
| Lack of honesty, trustworthiness or candor . . . . .   | 10.1                      |
| Other . . . . .                                        | 8.9                       |

Nearly one-third of the journalist sample listed "serving as apologists for their employers" when asked to select the single weakest point of public relations people. As noted in Chapter 2, this complaint dates back to the days when Ivy Lee--the nation's first real public relations practitioner--was called "his master's voice," and the complaint seems more common today than it was then (28:9). The journalist sample also scored the practitioner for a lack of understanding of news media and their needs, for a failure to provide information in a timely fashion, for a lack of honesty, trustworthiness and candor, and for promoting



unworthy causes and ignoring the public interest. The journalist sample's responses to this question are shown in Table 18.

Table 18

Top Six Weakest Points of Practitioners  
as Perceived by Journalists

| <u>Perceived Weakest Point</u>                          | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Serving as apologists for employers . . . . .           | 31.9%                         |
| Lack of understanding of news media and their needs . . | 24.6                          |
| Failure to provide information in a timely fashion . .  | 15.7                          |
| Lack of honesty, trustworthiness or candor . . . . .    | 10.9                          |
| Promoting unworthy causes . . . . .                     | 3.6                           |
| Ignoring the public interest . . . . .                  | 3.6                           |

The general public sample's response was almost identical to that of the journalist sample in selecting the top-ranking weakest point of practitioners; just over one-third of the general public respondents chose "serving as apologists for their employers." Slightly over 20 percent considered "ignoring the public interest" the practitioner's greatest fault, and an identical number listed "other." Among the "other" weaknesses were:

--"Lack of proper communications."

--"Complacency."

--"Not knowing their product."

--"Are paid to represent interest of their employer and therefore are biased."

--"Hewing to employer's line as opposed to candor."



Table 19 provides additional information.

Table 19

Top Five Weakest Points of Practitioners  
as Perceived by General Public

| <u>Perceived Weakest Point</u>                        | <u>Overall<br/>Percentage</u> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Serving as apologists for employers . . . . .         | 35.9%                         |
| Ignoring the public interest . . . . .                | 20.3                          |
| Other . . . . .                                       | 20.3                          |
| Promoting unworthy causes . . . . .                   | 14.0                          |
| Lack of honesty, trustworthiness and candor . . . . . | 6.5                           |

A necessary function?

The sixth subproblem asks whether top management, journalists and members of the general public consider public relations a necessary function. To obtain a measure of opinion to answer this question, respondents were asked directly about the need for public relations, although the questions were slightly different in scope on the three questionnaires. For the top management sample, the question concentrated on the need for public relations for the respondent's company: "Do you believe that public relations is a necessary function for your organization?" For the journalist sample, the questionnaire asked: "Do you think public relations is a necessary function for most organizations?" And for the general population sample, the questionnaire asked: "Do you believe public relations is a necessary function for most businesses?"

The answer to all three questions was overwhelmingly yes.



Details are provided in Table 20.

Table 20

Percentage of Respondents Who Consider  
Public Relations a Necessary Function

| <u>Category</u>          | <u>Percentage</u> |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Top management . . . . . | 84.3%             |
| Journalists . . . . .    | 96.5              |
| General public . . . . . | 89.7              |

#### Public relations and good performance

The seventh subproblem asks whether top management, journalists and members of the general public believe that good public relations is based on good performance. In this sense, good performance is intended to denote the quality of being worthwhile. Interpretation of the question, however, was left to each respondent.

It is a tenet of public relations that the cornerstone of good public relations is good performance. It was the purpose of this subproblem to determine whether members of the three publics sampled in the study considered good performance a requisite to good public relations. Those who answered no, presumably, believe that a person, product, idea or institution can have good public relations without necessarily being good or, at least, worthwhile. It follows, therefore, that they probably believe that a public relations program can deceive the public.



Respondents in all three samples responded by a margin of over 4 to 1 that they believe good public relations is based on good performance. It should be pointed out here, however, that the question, "In your opinion, is good public relations based on good performance?" was apparently confusing to a substantial number of respondents. Eight top management respondents (9.5 percent), 9 journalist respondents (6.3 percent), and 4 general population respondents (5.7 percent) failed to respond to the question.

The overwhelming affirmative response to this question demonstrates a surprising degree of sophistication concerning public relations, particularly on the part of the top management and general public samples. One could assume that journalists would agree that good performance is a requisite of good public relations because they consider themselves as gatekeepers between public relations campaigns for unworthy causes and the public. However, the public relations practitioner who has been hounded by management for some "good publicity" for a so-so product might blink his eyes in disbelief if told that over 85 percent of the top management officials sampled agreed that good performance is a requisite of good public relations. Learning that nearly 90 percent of a general public sample believed the same thing might prompt him to take a day off in celebration.

Exact percentages of respondents who said they consider that good public relations is based on good performance are shown in Table 21.



Table 21

Percentage of Respondents Who Believe Good Public Relations  
Is Based on Good Performance

| <u>Category</u>          | <u>Percentage</u> |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Top management . . . . . | 85.5%             |
| Journalists . . . . .    | 88.1              |
| General public . . . . . | 89.4              |

### Honesty and trustworthiness

The eighth subproblem asks how top management, journalists and members of the general public rate public relations practitioners in terms of honesty and trustworthiness. It has already been shown that about 10 percent of the top management respondents, 11 percent of the journalist respondents and 7 percent of the general public respondents consider that lack of honesty, trustworthiness or candor is the biggest single fault of public relations practitioners. To elicit more information on the perceived honesty and trustworthiness of practitioners, three additional questions were asked on each questionnaire:

(1) "Do you consider most public relations people honest?"

(2) "Do you believe you can trust most public relations people?"

(3) "Do you consider most public relations people ethical?"

In fact, the concepts of honesty and trustworthiness are very closely related, and they probably overlap in most respondents' minds. Trust (or trustworthiness) is usually considered



the stronger of the two and it generally denotes a feeling that a person will not fail in loyalty; it can be considered a measure of confidence in a person. Honest (or honesty), on the other hand, generally means a person is not given to lying, stealing or cheating. The concept of ethics is further removed; ethical generally denotes fair and just dealings with other people.

Because many general public respondents were assumed to have too little interface with practitioners to be able to adequately judge them on honesty and trustworthiness, the general public sample was offered a "don't know" option on these two questions. The other two samples were offered a simple dichotomous choice on all three questions, but a sizable number of the top management sample and the journalist sample failed to answer the questions. Many who did not answer the questions wrote in answers indicating that a yes-no choice was impossible to make because there are many practitioners who are honest and trustworthy and many who are not. This problem was one which did not arise on the pretest questionnaires, and it must be considered a fault in the design of the survey. Nevertheless, more than 85 percent of the top management respondents and more than 90 percent of the journalist respondents answered the questions, so some conclusions may be drawn.

Of those who made a choice, in the top management sample respondents considered practitioners honest by almost a 6-to-1 margin and trustworthy by more than a 5-to-1 margin. Journalists



were more skeptical, but they considered practitioners honest by more than a 2-to-1 margin. The journalists' margin on the trustworthiness of practitioners was much slimmer; of those making a yes-no choice, about 57 percent said they considered practitioners trustworthy and 43 percent said they did not. On the question of honesty, 42 percent of the general public respondents took the "don't know" option. Those who made a choice considered practitioners honest by a margin of 3 to 1. Slightly over one-third of the general public respondents chose "don't know" on the question of trustworthiness, but those who made a choice said by almost a 7-to-1 margin that they felt they could trust public relations people.

On the question of ethics, over 14 percent of the top management and general public respondents and 10 percent of the journalist respondents failed to answer. Of those who did answer, the top management respondents said by a 7-to-1 margin they considered practitioners ethical. The journalist sample agreed, but by slightly less than a 3-to-1 margin, as did the general public sample by slightly more than a 3-to-1 margin.

From these results, it is clear that the top management sample has far more trust and confidence in public relations people than does either the journalist sample or the general public sample. While a substantial number of the respondents doubt the honesty, trustworthiness and ethics of the practitioner, a majority of those willing to voice an opinion said they



considered most practitioners honest, trustworthy and ethical.

Detailed findings on these three questions are presented in Tables 22, 23 and 24.

Table 22

Perceived Honesty of Practitioners

| <u>Description</u>                | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Most practitioners honest . . . . | 77.4%                     | 63.6%                    | 43.5%                     |
| Most practitioners not honest . . | 13.1                      | 29.4                     | 14.5                      |
| Don't know . . . . .              | ----                      | ----                     | 42.0                      |
| No answer . . . . .               | 9.5                       | 6.3                      | 9.2                       |

Table 23

Perceived Trustworthiness of Practitioners

| <u>Description</u>               | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Can trust most practitioners . . | 72.6%                     | 51.7%                    | 39.1%                     |
| Can't trust most practitioners . | 13.1                      | 39.2                     | 24.6                      |
| Don't know . . . . .             | ----                      | ----                     | 36.2                      |
| No answer . . . . .              | 14.3                      | 9.1                      | 0.0                       |

Table 24

Perceived Ethics of Practitioners

| <u>Description</u>                | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Practitioners ethical . . . . .   | 75.0%                     | 65.7%                    | 65.7%                     |
| Practitioners not ethical . . . . | 10.7                      | 23.8                     | 20.0                      |
| No answer . . . . .               | 14.3                      | 10.5                     | 14.3                      |

Image of the practitioner

The ninth subproblem asks whether top management,



journalists and the general public hold a positive, neutral or negative image of the public relations practitioner. To obtain a measurement of the perceived image of the practitioner, the questionnaires asked each respondent, "How would you characterize your opinion of public relations people?" Five alternative choices were offered, ranging from strongly positive to strongly negative.

In all three sample groups, respondents chose "mildly positive" to describe their opinions of practitioners more often than they did any other single description. Details are shown in Table 25.

Table 25

## Opinion of Practitioners

| <u>Sample</u>  | <u>Strongly Positive</u> | <u>Mildly Positive</u> | <u>Neutral</u> | <u>Mildly Negative</u> | <u>Strongly Negative</u> |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Top Management | 15.9%                    | 43.9%                  | 22.0%          | 18.3%                  | 0.0%                     |
| Journalists    | 7.0                      | 44.1                   | 19.6           | 21.7                   | 7.7                      |
| General public | 10.4                     | 38.8                   | 28.4           | 20.9                   | 1.5                      |

Public interest and welfare

The tenth subproblem asks whether top management, journalists and members of the general public believe that the public relations practitioner does work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare. Respondents were asked directly, and only the general public sample was offered a "don't know" option.

More than 58 percent of the top management sample answered



that they believe practitioners do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare, but only slightly more than 30 percent of the journalists agreed. Of the general public respondents who made a yes-no choice, about 42 percent replied that they believe practitioners do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare.

Table 26 provides detailed percentages.

Table 26

Do Public Relations Practitioners Do Work Which Is  
in Public Interest or Serves Public Welfare?

| <u>Response</u>      | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Yes . . . . .        | 58.3%                     | 31.5%                    | 31.4%                     |
| No . . . . .         | 33.3                      | 60.8                     | 45.7                      |
| Don't know . . . . . | ----                      | ----                     | 22.8                      |
| No answer . . . . .  | 8.3                       | 7.7                      | 0.0                       |

On this question, it seems likely that top management respondents consider, for the most part, that the practitioner's work helps business. It follows that increased business helps the economy, and therefore, top management respondents could reason, public relations practitioners do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare. The journalist and general population samples, however, seem to view such syllogisms with more cynicism. On balance, it seems clear that most respondents do not consider that practitioners do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare.



### Importance of public relations

The eleventh subproblem asks whether top management, journalists and members of the general public believe the importance of public relations is increasing, remaining about the same, or decreasing. In response to a direct question, more than 65 percent of the respondents in each of the categories responded that they believe the importance of public relations is increasing. Fewer than 5 percent of the respondents in any category considered the importance of public relations to be decreasing. Detailed percentages are provided in Table 27.

Table 27

#### Perceived Importance of Public Relations

| <u>Importance believed:</u>      | <u>Top<br/>Management</u> | <u>Jour-<br/>nalists</u> | <u>General<br/>Public</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Increasing . . . . .             | 66.3%                     | 65.5%                    | 68.7%                     |
| Remaining about the same . . . . | 32.5                      | 31.7                     | 26.9                      |
| Decreasing . . . . .             | 1.2                       | 2.1                      | 4.5                       |

### Relationships between variables

The final subproblem asks whether there is a relationship between opinions of public relations practitioners and (a) age, (b) education, (c) amount of contact with practitioners, or (d) other variables. To provide data for this subproblem, responses from every question which elicited interval data were compared with responses to every other question which elicited interval data (within the same sample) by means of a Pearson  $r$  correlation,



and a correlation coefficient was obtained for each comparison. In addition, degree of confidence was computed for each correlation coefficient. No correlation will be discussed in this section unless it approaches 0.3 and has a confidence level of .05 or greater.

Top management sample. In the top management sample, there were no significant correlations between age and other variables. Education, however, did correlate with one variable: ranking in occupational prestige. Correlation between these 2 variables was +0.37 (with a .001 confidence level), indicating that the better educated top management respondents are more likely than their less educated counterparts to rank practitioners high in occupational prestige.

Of the 2 measures of company size, annual sales did not correlate significantly with any other variable of interest to the study, but number of employees correlated significantly with a number of other variables. Each will be discussed briefly.

Correlation between number of employees and frequency the respondent works with public relations practitioners was +0.47 and significant at the .001 level, indicating that within this sample the larger the company (in terms of employees), the greater the likelihood that top management will work frequently with public relations people.

Correlation between number of employees and the perceived



need for public relations in respondents' companies was +0.39 and significant at the .001 level of confidence, meaning that the respondent who works for a company with a greater number of employees is more likely than his counterpart who works with a company with a lesser number of employees to consider public relations a necessary company function.

A very high positive correlation (+0.58) was shown between number of employees and the top public relations official having a voice in company policy, and this correlation was significant at the .001 level of confidence. Hence, one may conclude that as far as this sample is concerned, the more employees a respondent's company has, the more likely the company's senior public relations practitioner is to have a voice in company policy.

In addition, there was a significant positive correlation (+0.38 at the .001 level of confidence) between number of employees and respondents' ratings of the advice and counsel they have received from practitioners. The more employees a top management respondent's company has, the more likely the respondent is to perceive that the advice and counsel he receives from practitioners is correct and dependable.

Correlation between number of employees and respondents' perception of whether practitioners have understood and met the company's needs was also significant (+0.43) and the degree of confidence was at the .001 level. In short, the respondent with



a company which has a large number of employees is more likely than his counterpart with a smaller company to perceive that practitioners have understood and met the needs of his company.

There was also a significant positive correlation (+0.32) between number of employees and whether respondents consider public relations practitioners professionals, and this was significant at the .002 level. Hence, the respondent with a large company (in terms of employees) is more likely to consider practitioners professionals than is his counterpart with a smaller company. There was no significant correlation between number of employees and respondents considering the practice of public relations a profession.

The respondent working for a company with a higher number of employees is also more likely to perceive public relations practitioners as being more competent. The correlation between these variables is +0.43, and it is significant at the .001 level of confidence.

Finally, there is a moderate positive correlation (+0.37) between number of employees and respondents' ranking of practitioners in occupational prestige, and the level of confidence in this was .001. Respondents with companies which employ more people are more likely to rank the public relations practitioner highly in occupational prestige.

A discussion of the substantial correlation between number of employees and attitude toward public relations people



is appropriate. It might be postulated that--perhaps because of the need for good employee relations--the top management of companies with many employees has felt a greater need for public relations assistance than has the top management of companies with fewer employees. It could be further postulated that a company with a great many employees has the personnel assets to locate and recruit capable public relations practitioners, and, further, that such companies have hired practitioners who are generally more capable than has the average company. Hence, it would follow that because the top management respondent in a company with many employees works with capable practitioners, he is far more likely than his counterpart in a company with fewer employees to have high regard for public relations people. This of course, is only one of many possibilities. It does not, however, seem unreasonable, particularly given the lack of substantial correlation between sales and other variables on the questionnaire.

There is no significant correlation between the number of years of management experience and other variables of interest, and correlation between position and other variables is not possible because position was not quantified into interval data.

A number of significant correlations were found between the frequency respondents work with public relations people and other variables. All were in the direction which could have been expected, and each will be discussed briefly.



Correlation between the frequency respondents work with practitioners and respondents' perceived need for public relations was quite high (+0.58) and significant at the .001 level, meaning that respondents who consider public relations necessary for their companies meet with practitioners more often than do respondents who do not consider public relations a necessary function for their companies.

Respondents who see practitioners frequently also consider that they have a better understanding of public relations as a management function than do respondents who do not work frequently with practitioners. Correlation of these two variables was +0.49 and degree of confidence .001.

There was a high correlation between respondents who see practitioners frequently and practitioners having a voice in company policy. Correlation of these two variables was +0.67 and degree of confidence was .001.

In addition, respondents who see practitioners frequently are quite likely to perceive that practitioners understand and meet company needs with more consistency. Correlation of these two variables was +0.71 and level of confidence was .001.

Respondents who see practitioners frequently are likely to consider practitioners professionals more often (correlation +0.39 at the .001 level of confidence) and to consider the practice of public relations a profession more often (correlation +0.30 and level of confidence .003).



Respondents who see practitioners frequently are very likely to rate practitioners high in competence. Correlation of these two variables was +0.60 and degree of confidence was .001. Moreover, these respondents have a substantially higher opinion of practitioners, as demonstrated by a correlation coefficient of +0.40 and a confidence level of .001.

And, of course, respondents who see practitioners more frequently are likely to rank the practitioner higher in occupational prestige. Correlation on these two variables was +0.48 and degree of confidence .001.

With the data available from this sample group, it is not possible to say with certainty that a causal relationship exists between the frequency respondents work with public relations people and the other variables discussed above. It is obvious, however, that a very close relationship exists between the frequency with which respondents see practitioners and the respondents' perceptions of public relations and the practitioner. It seems reasonable to conclude that the frequency a top management respondent works with public relations people has a great effect on his perception of public relations and that his perception of public relations has a great effect on the frequency he works with practitioners. Hence, one is probably safe in looking upon the frequency top management works with public relations people as both cause and effect. At the very minimum, it can be said that (as far as this sample is



concerned) the frequency a top management respondent works with public relations people will be a reliable predictor of his attitude toward public relations and public relations people.

There are a great many other correlations which are statistically significant, but they serve simply to confirm relationships between variables which a reasonable person would assume are related (such as a high correlation between perceived honesty and perceived trustworthiness of practitioners).

Journalist sample. In the journalist sample, there were no significant correlations between age or education and other variables. Frequency with which journalists work with public relations people, however, did correlate significantly with three variables, and these will be discussed briefly.

There was a moderate positive correlation (+0.31) between the frequency respondents worked with practitioners and their opinion on the need for public relations, and this correlation had a confidence level of .001. This indicates that journalist respondents who work most often with practitioners believe that public relations is a necessary function for most organizations with more frequency than do journalists who work less often with practitioners.

There was a moderate correlation (+0.36) between the frequency respondents worked with practitioners and their ratings of the information and materials they received from practitioners.



during the past year. This correlation had a confidence level of .001, and it indicates that respondents who worked most often with public relations people during the past year gave high ratings to the information and materials they received from the practitioners.

In addition, there was a moderate positive relationship between the frequency respondents worked with practitioners and their opinions of whether practitioners had understood and met their organization's needs. Correlation coefficient for these two variables was +0.32 and degree of confidence was .001. This indicates that journalist respondents who worked most closely with practitioners are the ones most likely to give practitioners high marks on meeting news media needs.

As with the top management sample, it is not possible to say with certainty that a causal relationship exists between the frequency respondents work with practitioners and other variables discussed here, but it is obvious that a close relationship exists between the frequency respondents see practitioners and the respondents' view of public relations. As in the top management sample, it seems reasonable to conclude that the frequency a journalist respondent works with public relations people has a substantial effect on his perception of public relations, and his perception of public relations has a substantial effect on the frequency he works with practitioners. In the journalist sample, however, respondents probably do not exercise



as much control over the frequency with which they see public relations people (since in many cases their jobs require that they deal with practitioners). Hence, in the journalist sample it seems reasonable that working with practitioners is likely to be the cause and more favorable attitudes toward practitioners the effect.

In addition to those discussed above, there are a great many other correlations which are statistically significant. Like those cited in the preceding section, however, they simply serve to confirm relationships one would suspect between variables and they contain no surprises.

General population sample. In the general population sample, two correlations between age and other variables approached 0.3 and both had very high confidence levels. Each will be discussed briefly.

Correlation between age and respondents' perception of whether most practitioners do a good job was +0.29, with a confidence level of .006. This indicates that older general public respondents are somewhat more likely to believe that most public relations people do a good job than are younger respondents in this sample.

Correlation between age and respondents' perception of whether "most companies listen to their public relations people" was also +0.29, with a confidence level of .007. This means that



older general population respondents are somewhat more likely to believe that most companies listen to their public relations people, or, put another way, to believe that practitioners have at least some voice in company policy.

There were also several correlations between education in the general population sample and other variables. Each of these will be discussed briefly.

There is a correlation of  $+0.32$  between education and reporting knowing the meaning of public relations, and this is significant at the  $.004$  level of confidence. This indicates, of course, that the better educated general population respondent is somewhat more likely to report that he knows the meaning of public relations than is his counterpart with less education.

Correlation between education and having known a public relations person was  $+0.34$  and significant at the  $.002$  level of confidence. This simply indicates that respondents with more education are somewhat more likely to have known or worked with a public relations practitioner.

In addition, there was a moderate negative correlation ( $-0.37$ ) between education and ranking of public relations people in occupational prestige, significant at the  $.001$  level of confidence. This indicates that the general population respondent with more education is somewhat more likely to rank the practitioner lower in occupational prestige than is his less educated counterpart.



The first two correlations between education and other variables can probably be explained by considering that the person with greater education is likely to travel in circles where he is more likely to meet a wide range of persons in business, including public relations people. Moreover, the person with greater education is known to read more. The combination of these two factors would appear to account for these two correlations.

As for the negative correlation between education and occupational ranking, one suspects that this is more a reflection of persons with lower education ranking public relations people more highly than it is of persons with greater education ranking practitioners lower on the scale. It may also be that acquiescence response has played a role here.

In the general population sample, there are also a number of correlations between the frequency respondents see or work with public relations people and other variables. Each of these will be discussed briefly.

The strongest of these is a correlation between frequency respondents see or work with practitioners and the perceived competence of practitioners. This has a correlation coefficient of +0.57 and a confidence level of .001, indicating that a respondent who sees practitioners more frequently is more likely to rate practitioners more highly in competence.

There is also a reasonably strong correlation (+0.53)



between the frequency respondents see or work with practitioners and the degree to which practitioners are perceived to have met respondents' needs. The respondent who sees practitioners more often also perceives that practitioners understand and meet his needs more often.

General population respondents who see or work with public relations people more frequently also tend to perceive them as honest more often (correlation coefficient +0.36, level of confidence .001) and more trustworthy (correlation coefficient +0.35, confidence level .002). Moreover, they tend to consider the practice a profession more often (correlation coefficient +0.31, confidence level .006).

Finally, respondents who see or work with practitioners more often tend to perceive practitioners as being more competent. Correlation coefficient on this is +0.33 and degree of confidence is .006.

In summary, it can be said that the general public sample serves to confirm the trend between frequency of contact with public relations people and attitude toward practitioners noted in the other two samples. Barring some unforeseen design error, it can be stated on the strength of the data from these three independent samples that persons who see public relations practitioners frequently are more likely to have favorable attitudes toward them than are persons who do not see them frequently. Conversely, it can be stated that persons who have a favorable



attitude toward public relations practitioners are more likely to see practitioners frequently.

In addition to the correlations discussed here, there are a number of others which are statistically significant. Like those cited in the previous two sections, they serve mainly to confirm relationships one would suspect between variables and contain no supprises.



## Chapter 5

### COMPOSITE PICTURES

The problem statement for this thesis asks how senior corporation executives, working journalists and members of the general public perceive the public relations practitioner and the practice of public relations. By examining the data in some substantial detail, the preceding chapter has answered most of the questions implicit in that problem statement. However, another of the tasks outlined in the introductory chapter of this study was to sketch a composite picture of public relations and the public relations practitioner as perceived by their publics. This chapter will seek to do that.

The preceding chapter sought to provide the reader with a simplified profile of the typical respondent within each of the three sample groups by analyzing demographic data and extracting, wherever possible, median values. Wherever median values were not available because of the lack of interval data, mode values were used. In providing a composite picture of public relations and the public relations practitioner, this chapter will rely on the same methods. The composite pictures will be public relations and the public relations practitioner as perceived by the typical respondents described in Chapter 4.



## AS PERCEIVED BY TOP MANAGEMENT

It will be recalled that the typical top management respondent to this survey is president of a manufacturing firm which has about 8,000 employees and annual sales of approximately \$650,000,000. He is 52 years of age, has almost a full year of graduate education beyond his undergraduate degree, and he has just over 21 years of management experience. He has never worked in public relations on a full time basis.

The typical top management respondent considers that he has a good understanding of public relations as a management function, and he defines public relations as "winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance." He considers that public relations is a necessary function for his company, and he employs someone he considers to be a capable public relations practitioner. On the average, he works with his public relations people on a direct basis about once a week or slightly less frequently, and he has given his top public relations official at least some voice in company policy. He rates the advice and counsel he has received from public relations people employed or retained by his company over the last year somewhere between "usually" correct and dependable and "consistently" correct and dependable, and in his opinion public relations practitioners have usually understood and met the company's needs. He considers public relations practitioners honest, trustworthy and ethical



for the most part. He also believes that most public relations people do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare and that they make a sincere effort to facilitate a free flow of information between management and the public. He believes strongly that the importance of public relations is increasing, and he considers most public relations practitioners today to be competent. In his opinion, the strongest single point of the practitioner is the ability to gain news media and public understanding for the company, serving as a kind of middleman between management and the public. But the weakest point of public relations practitioners, in his opinion, is their lack of understanding of the company or its industry. He does not consider public relations practitioners as professionals, nor does he consider the practice of public relations a profession. Asked to rank the public relations practitioner in terms of occupational prestige, he would place the practitioner beneath a lawyer, an accountant, a department store manager and a high school teacher but above a newspaper reporter, a real estate salesman and a used car salesman. Overall, he believes that most public relations people do a good job, but there is some doubt in his mind.

#### AS PERCEIVED BY JOURNALISTS

The typical journalist respondent to this survey is a



specialized editor (such as a business or financial editor) of a large daily newspaper which circulates in a metropolitan area and is generally read throughout the state. He is 42 years old, a college graduate who has taken a few graduate courses, and he began working for a newspaper almost 20 years ago when he finished his education. He lives in a large city.

The typical journalist respondent believes very strongly that he has a good understanding of what public relations people do, and he defines public relations as "promoting a person, product, idea or institution." Many of his colleagues, he could probably tell you, consider public relations to be "influencing public opinion through publicity," and almost as many consider it "winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance." He agrees that good public relations is based on good performance, perhaps because he sees himself as a gatekeeper between public relations programs and the public. He feels strongly that public relations is a necessary function for most organizations, and he believes the importance of public relations is increasing. He works with public relations people slightly more often than once a week, and he considers them basically honest, competent people. He receives a substantial amount of information from his public relations contacts, and he considers it usually correct and dependable. Asked whether public relations people he has worked with over the past year have understood and



met his newspaper's needs, however, he is torn between answering "usually" and "sometimes." The background and training of most public relations practitioners, he believes, is less than adequate, and all too often practitioners don't meet media needs because they don't fully understand them. Moreover, he does not believe that most public relations people have a voice in their companies' policies. He considers that the very weakest point of public relations practitioners is that they serve as apologists for their employers, though this is counterbalanced to some extent by their strongest point: their ability to provide information. Asked to rank practitioners in occupational prestige, he would place them below lawyers, accountants, high school teachers and newspaper reporters but above real estate salesmen and used car salesmen. On balance, he believes that just over half the public relations practitioners do a good job, but he certainly does not consider practitioners as professionals nor their practice as a profession.

#### AS PERCEIVED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The typical general public respondent is 44 years old and left college during his senior year to go to work. He describes his job today as "management" and he lives in a community with a population of about 125,000.

Quite frankly, he will tell you, he hasn't a great deal



of interest in public relations. He's heard the term bandied about before and feels that he knows basically what it means, but he is not really quite sure. Given a list of alternatives, he'll probably choose "winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance" as a good definition, but some of those other alternatives seem to him to provide good definitions too, particularly, "promoting a person, product, idea or institution" and "promoting good will or rapport." He knows at least one public relations practitioner, and he sees public relations people several times a year. He also feels that he has a pretty good understanding of public relations. He believes that good public relations is based on good performance, that public relations is a necessary function for most organizations today, and that the importance of public relations is probably increasing. He also believes that most public relations people give good advice to their companies and that most of the time companies listen to the advice they get from their public relations people--though he's not quite sure that they listen. He's not sure whether most public relations people are honest and trustworthy, but if pressed he'd probably say they are. As for ethics, he believes most public relations people are ethical. He would characterize most public relations people as "competent" and tell you he thinks they probably do a good job. If asked to rank the public relations practitioner in occupational prestige, he'd probably



rank him below lawyers, accountants, high school teachers, department store managers and newspaper reporters but above real estate salesmen and used car salesmen. He really has no idea whether public relations practitioners have adequate background and training, but as far as understanding and meeting his needs, public relations people have done pretty well. He's not quite sure what the practitioner's strongest point is, but he'd probably say that it's serving as a middleman between management and the public. On the other hand, he might tell you it is the practitioner's ability to interpret complex information for newsmen and the public. Whatever the practitioner's strongest point, the typical general public respondent knows with some certainty that the practitioner's weakest point is serving as an apologist for his employer. On balance, he does not consider the practitioner a professional (though he is not really sure about this) nor does he consider the practice of public relations a profession. He does, however, look upon practitioners in a mildly positive fashion and considers them a link between business (and government) and the public.



## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has been based on a descriptive study which had as its goal determining how senior corporation executives, working journalists and members of the general public perceive the public relations practitioner and the practice of public relations. The preceding chapters have aimed to describe and analyze these perceptions. This chapter will briefly discuss some of the most important shortcomings of the study, suggest some areas related to the study which might be worthy of future research, and conclude the thesis with an observation on the state of the image of public relations.

Most of the shortcomings in this study which are immediately apparent to the author stem from (1) the fact that the study was done under the pressure of a deadline and (2) fiscal constraints. No doubt scholars down through the ages have lamented the shortages of time and money which preclude them from being able to conduct research the way they would like. This author is no exception.

One of the most serious shortcomings of this study is the lack of random selection of the sample populations. Random selection of the top management sample would have been feasible had more time been available. Random selection of the journalist sample and the general public sample would have been possible only with



far more sophisticated sampling resources than those generally available for small, relatively inexpensive studies of this nature.

Another of the most serious shortcomings of this study is the fact that the survey upon which the study was based was conducted by mail. Historically, mail surveys have produced low response rates, and this study was no exception. The U.S. Postal Service returned as "undeliverable" only 9 of the 1,200 survey forms mailed. Presumably, nearly all of the remaining 1,191 reached the addresses to which they were sent. Yet fewer than 300 completed questionnaires were returned. Certainly the relatively low cost of surveying by mail was a decided advantage in this study--and the principal reason mail surveying was used--but the low response rate and the many other deficiencies of the mail survey method make mail surveys a poor choice for the researcher who requires responses which cannot be fully quantified or reduced to a simple "check the right answer" format.

While the questionnaires used in the survey were reasonably simple and straightforward, on one count they proved to be oversimplified and on another too confusing (or too taxing) for many respondents. The oversimplification occurred in questions asking respondents for simple dichotomous choices (yes-no, for example) on matters some respondents felt could not be adequately covered with such answers. An example of this is the question asking, "Do you consider public relations people ethical?" Between the "yes" and "no" choices provided, one respondent wrote,



"Somewhere between yes and no." Others wrote "Some of each," and still others checked both answers. The confusing (or taxing) question asked respondents to rank eight occupations in terms of occupational prestige and provided the added instruction: "Place 1 by best, 2 by second best, 3 by third best, etc." Yet a substantial number of people failed to complete this question.

Certainly there are other shortcomings in the study, but the author considers those mentioned above as the most significant.

The results of the study suggest at least two areas worthy of future research.

Inasmuch as this study was not based on randomly selected sample populations and the response rate averaged only about 25 percent of the total number of questionnaires mailed, a study of similar scope is needed to replicate findings or discover significant differences. While this study represents the best information currently available on public perceptions of public relations and of practitioners, the validity of the study is subject to challenge because of the combination of the lack of random selection of samples and the low response rates.

Another related area worthy of future research is the perceptions of public relations practitioners concerning their own vocation. Had time and money permitted, this study would have sampled practitioners as well as top management, journalists and members of the general public. A survey of practitioners,



covering many of the same areas covered by this study, would make a worthwhile contribution to knowledge and, probably, an interesting contrast to the findings in this study.

In conclusion, it is clear that the images of public relations and the public relations practitioner are not as shabby as one might believe from reading the popular press and the comics page. Typically, such sources would have the reader believe that the public relations practitioner is a smiling, fast-talking phony whose talents are not far removed from those of the snake oil peddler of old and whose product is on par with snake oil. To the contrary, a substantial proportion of the respondents in all three samples surveyed in this study perceive the public relations practitioner as an honest, trustworthy and competent person who generally does a good job and performs a necessary function. Like people in other callings, he has his strengths and his weaknesses. And if the practice of public relations has not attained the status of a profession and the practitioner is not widely accepted as a professional (as is the case, according to the study), public relations practitioners can take some satisfaction in the gains their vocation has made in recent years as they strive to improve the image of the calling in the years ahead.

If good performance is, indeed, the cornerstone of good public relations (as a large majority of the respondents surveyed in this study say they believe it is), the public relations



practitioner can apparently look forward to good public relations for the practice in the future. The first concern with improving the image of public relations, however, must be with good performance.



## LIST OF REFERENCES



#### LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Bernays, Edward L. Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.
2. Blumenthal, L. Roy. The Practice of Public Relations. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1972.
3. Brandenburg, George A. "PR a Top Level Function in Corporate Management," Editor & Publisher, November 12, 1960, p. 15.
4. Canfield, Bertrand R. and H. Frazier Moore. Public Relations Principles, Cases and Problems. 6th ed. Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1973.
5. Childs, Harwood L., ed. "Professional Services. Current Trends in Public Relations," The Public Opinion Quarterly, July 1939, pp. 507-515.
6. Cutlip, Scott M. and Allen H. Center. Effective Public Relations, Pathways to Public Favor. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952.
7. \_\_\_\_\_. Effective Public Relations. 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971.
8. Dougherty, Philip L. "Advertising: Shining P.R. Image," The New York Times, July 31, 1973, p. 47.
9. Forrestal, Dan J. "Placing Public Relations in Perspective," Public Relations Journal, March 1974, pp. 6-9.
10. Gildea, Robert L. "Controversy. Wanted: A Vigorous PR Effort for PR," Public Relations Journal, November 1975, pp. 24, 29.
11. Goldman, Eric F. Two-Way Street, The Emergence of the Public Relations Counsel. Boston: Bellman Publishing Co., Inc., 1948.
12. Hawkins, Lester G. and George S. Pettee. "OWI - Organization and Problems," Public Opinion Quarterly, Spring 1943, pp. 24-35.
13. Heilbroner, Robert L. "Public Relations, the Invisible Sell," Harper's Magazine, June 1957, pp. 23-31.



14. Henry, Kenneth. Defenders and Shapers of the Corporate Image. New Haven, N.J.: College & University Press, 1972.
15. Hiebert, Ray Eldon. Courtier to the Crowd. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1966.
16. Hill, John W. The Making of a Public Relations Man. New York: David McKay, Inc., 1963.
17. Lee, Burns W., ed. "A Report and Recommended Program for Action to Improve the Image of the Public Relations Field." Report presented to the Public Relations Society of America by the Special Task Force on Public Relations. Los Angeles, November 15, 1975.
18. Lerbinger, Otto and Albert J. Sullivan, eds. Information, Influence and Communication, A Reader in Public Relations. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1965.
19. McIntyre, Robert B. "Public Relations. Sattler Gives Results of P.R. Info Survey," Editor & Publisher, June 17, 1961, p. 46.
20. McKee, Blaine, Oguz B. Nayman and Dan L. Lattimore. "How PR People See Themselves," Public Relations Journal, November 1975, pp. 47-52.
21. "Newspapermen and Practitioners Differ Widely on PR Role," Public Relations Journal, August 1975, pp. 24-25.
22. Packard, Vance. "Public Relations, Good or Bad?" Atlantic Monthly, May 1958, pp. 53-57.
23. Poorman, Paul. "Public Relations - the Newsman's View," Public Relations Journal, March 1974, p. 14.
24. Pimlott, J.A.R. Public Relations and American Democracy. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1951.
25. Raucher, Alan R. Public Relations and Business 1900-1929. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.
26. Ross, Irwin. The Image Merchants. Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1958.
27. Sandman, Peter M., David M. Rubin, and David B. Sachsman. Media, An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Communications. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.



28. Simon, Raymond, ed. Perspectives in Public Relations. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966.
29. Steinberg, Charles S. The Creation of Consent. New York: Hastings House, 1975.
30. "Study Underscores PR's Changing Role," Editor & Publisher, July 14, 1962, p. 39.
31. Sussman, Leila A. "The Personnel and Ideology of Public Relations," Public Opinion Quarterly, Winter 1948-49, pp. 697-708.
32. Time Essay. "The Arts and Uses of Public Relations," Time, July 7, 1967, pp. 40-41.
33. "Time Opinion Survey Reveals PR Professionals' Views," Public Relations Journal, January 1976, pp. 42-43.
34. "Viewing the Press," The New York Times, January 14, 1974, p. 43.
35. Walker, S.H. and Paul Skylar. "Business Finds Its Voice," Harper's Magazine, January 1938, pp. 112-124.
36. \_\_\_\_\_ and Paul Skylar. "Business Finds Its Voice," Harper's Magazine, February 1938, pp. 430-441.
37. Werks, Pierre. "Controversy. Improving the Image of Public Relations," Public Relations Journal, February 1975, p. 24.



## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

## SAMPLE LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

June 13, 1976

Dear Sir:

Will you take a few minutes to share some of your opinions by completing a short survey form for a graduate research project? It won't take long, and I think you'll find it interesting.

As a basis for my master's thesis, this survey is part of a major research project I have undertaken at San Diego State University to determine what people like you think about public relations. Your individual response, of course, will be anonymous. It could, however, help chart the course for public relations in the years ahead because the overall results of the survey will be shared with a nationwide audience of men and women who work in public relations through articles in two magazines and coverage in at least one college textbook on public relations.

The enclosed survey form is self-explanatory. Just complete it according to the directions, place it in the enclosed envelope, and drop it in a mailbox. No postage is needed.

To preserve your anonymity, please do not place your name or address on either the survey form or the return envelope.

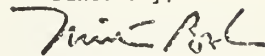
I'll start tabulating the results of the survey within a month, so I'd appreciate your filling out the survey form and mailing it as soon as possible. Why not do it now?

I hope to have the results of the survey tabulated within a month. If you'd like a copy of the results, just drop me a post card at the following address:

1150 Anchorage Lane, Apt. 207  
San Diego, California 92106

Let me thank you in advance for your help in making this a useful and worthwhile project.

Sincerely,



Milton S. Baker, Jr.



## SAMPLE TOP MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

For office use only:  
Survey No. 1  
Sequence No. \_\_\_\_\_

June 1976

SURVEY OF TOP MANAGEMENT

DIRECTIONS: This survey has no right or wrong answers and it is completely anonymous. For questions 1 through 5, please place the appropriate answer in the blank beside the question. For all the remaining questions except the last one, please place an X or a check mark in the blank beside the one answer you consider best. For the last question, please follow the directions given in the question. After you have completed the questionnaire, please place it in the enclosed envelope and mail it. No postage is necessary.

1. What is your present age?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many years of formal education do you have?

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Approximately how many employees does your organization have?

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the approximate current annual sales figure for your organization?

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many years experience do you have in management?

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the primary business of your organization?

6. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Manufacturing consumer goods  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ Manufacturing industrial goods  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Wholesale sales and/or distribution  
D. \_\_\_\_\_ Retail sales  
E. \_\_\_\_\_ Transportation  
F. \_\_\_\_\_ Banking or finance  
G. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. What is your present position with your organization?

7. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Chairman and president  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ Chairman  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ President  
D. \_\_\_\_\_ Senior or executive vice president  
E. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you ever worked in public relations on a full time basis?

8. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No



TH2

9. Have you ever known or worked with a public relations person?

9. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

10. On the average, how often do you now work with people employed in public relations?

10. A. ☐ Not at all  
B. ☐ Once a year or less  
C. ☐ Several times a year  
D. ☐ Monthly  
E. ☐ Weekly  
F. ☐ Daily or more often

11. Do you believe that public relations is a necessary function for your organization?

11. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

12. Do you consider that you have a good understanding of public relations as a management function?

12. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

13. In your opinion, is good public relations based on good performance?

13. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

14. Do you believe the background and training of public relations people are adequate?

14. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

15. Do you believe that public relations people generally do a good job?

15. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

16. Do you consider most public relations people honest?

16. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

17. Do you believe you can trust most public relations people?

17. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

18. Does the top public relations official in your company have a voice in company policy?

18. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No  
C. ☐ We have no public relations people



19. How would you rate the professional advice and counsel you have received from public relations people during the past year?

19. A. ☐ Consistently correct and dependable  
 B. ☐ Usually correct and dependable  
 C. ☐ Sometimes correct and dependable  
 D. ☐ Seldom correct or dependable  
 E. ☐ Never correct or dependable  
 F. ☐ No advice received from public relations people

20. Have public relations people employed or retained by your organization during the past year understood and met the needs of the organization?

20. A. ☐ Have consistently understood and met our needs  
 B. ☐ Have usually understood and met our needs  
 C. ☐ Have sometimes understood and met our needs  
 D. ☐ Have seldom understood or met our needs  
 E. ☐ Have never understood or met our needs  
 F. ☐ No public relations people employed or retained by our company

21. Do you consider public relations people professionals in the sense that doctors, lawyers and engineers are professionals?

21. A. ☐ Yes  
 B. ☐ No

22. Do you consider the practice of public relations to be a profession in the sense that the practice of medicine or law is a profession?

22. A. ☐ Yes  
 B. ☐ No

23. Do you believe the importance of public relations in business is increasing, remaining about the same, or decreasing?

23. A. ☐ Increasing  
 B. ☐ Remaining about the same  
 C. ☐ Decreasing

24. Judging from your experience with public relations people during the past year, how would you characterize the competence of public relations people in general?

24. A. ☐ Highly competent  
 B. ☐ Competent  
 C. ☐ Less than competent  
 D. ☐ No experience with public relations people during the past year

25. How would you characterize your opinion of public relations people?

25. A. ☐ Strongly positive  
 B. ☐ Mildly positive  
 C. ☐ Neutral  
 D. ☐ Mildly negative  
 E. ☐ Strongly negative

26. Do you believe that most public relations people do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare?

26. A. ☐ Yes  
 B. ☐ No



TM4

27. In your opinion, do public relations people make a sincere effort to facilitate a free flow of information between management and the public?

27. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

28. In your opinion, what is the strongest point of public relations people?

28. A. ☐ Honesty, trustworthiness and candor  
B. ☐ Desire to serve the public interest  
C. ☐ Ability to properly counsel management  
D. ☐ Ability to interpret complex information for newsmen and/or the public  
E. ☐ Ability to foster government relations  
F. ☐ Gaining news media and/or public understanding for the company  
G. ☐ Middleman between management and the public  
H. ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

29. In your opinion, what is the weakest point of public relations people?

29. A. ☐ Lack of honesty, trustworthiness or candor  
B. ☐ Ignoring the public interest  
C. ☐ Failure to comprehend the needs of management  
D. ☐ Failure to properly counsel management  
E. ☐ Lack of understanding of company or industry  
F. ☐ Failure to obtain good news coverage for company  
G. ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

30. Which of the following do you believe best describes public relations?

30. A. ☐ Winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance  
B. ☐ Influencing public opinion through publicity  
C. ☐ Influencing public opinion through two-way communications  
D. ☐ Promoting a person, product, idea or institution  
E. ☐ Promoting rapport or good will  
F. ☐ Making people believe something is better (or worse) than it really is  
G. ☐ Manipulating public opinion  
H. ☐ Press agentry, propaganda and lobbying

31. Do you consider public relations people ethical?

31. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

32. How would you rank the following in terms of occupational prestige? (Place 1 by best, 2 by second best, etc.)

32. A. ☐ Accountant  
B. ☐ Department store manager  
C. ☐ High school teacher  
D. ☐ Lawyer  
E. ☐ Newspaper reporter  
F. ☐ Public relations man  
G. ☐ Real estate salesman  
H. ☐ Used car salesman

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP. PLEASE MAIL THIS FORM IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.



## SAMPLE JOURNALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

For office use only:  
Survey No. 2  
Sequence No. \_\_\_\_\_

June 1976

SURVEY OF JOURNALISTS

DIRECTIONS: This survey has no right or wrong answers and it is completely anonymous. For questions 1 through 4, please place the appropriate answer in the blank beside the question. For all the remaining questions except the last one, please place an X or a check mark in the blank beside the one answer you consider best. For the last question, please follow the directions given in the question. After you have completed the questionnaire, please place it in the enclosed envelope and mail it. No postage is necessary.

---

1. What is your present age?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many years of formal education do you have?

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the approximate population of the community where you work?

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. How many years experience do you have in news media work?

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. What type audience does your organization serve?

5. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Small community  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ Large city or metropolitan area  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Major part of state or entire state  
D. \_\_\_\_\_ Large region including two or more states  
E. \_\_\_\_\_ National or international

6. What type of organization are you employed by?

6. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Newspaper  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ Wire service  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Magazine  
D. \_\_\_\_\_ Radio station  
E. \_\_\_\_\_ Television station  
F. \_\_\_\_\_ Network  
G. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. What is your present position with your organization?

7. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Reporter  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ Specialized writer  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Editor (please specify type) \_\_\_\_\_  
D. \_\_\_\_\_ Correspondent  
E. \_\_\_\_\_ News director  
F. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



8. Have you ever worked in public relations on a full time basis?

8. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

9. Have you ever known or worked with a public relations person?

9. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

10. On the average, how often do you work with people employed in public relations?

10. A. ☐ Not at all  
B. ☐ Once a year or less  
C. ☐ Several times a year  
D. ☐ Monthly  
E. ☐ Weekly  
F. ☐ Daily or more often

11. Do you believe that public relations is a necessary function for most organizations?

11. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

12. Do you consider that you have a good understanding of what public relations people do?

12. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

13. In your opinion, is good public relations based on good performance?

13. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

14. Do you believe the background and training of public relations people are adequate?

14. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

15. Do you believe that public relations people generally do a good job?

15. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

16. Do you consider most public relations people honest?

16. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

17. Do you believe you can trust most public relations people?

17. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

18. Do you believe that public relations people have a voice in company policy in most cases?

18. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No



J3

19. How would you rate the information and materials you have received from public relations people during the last year?

19. A. ☐ Consistently correct and dependable  
 B. ☐ Usually correct and dependable  
 C. ☐ Sometimes correct and dependable  
 D. ☐ Seldom correct and dependable  
 E. ☐ Never correct and dependable  
 F. ☐ No information or materials received from public relations people

20. Have public relations people with whom you have worked during the last year understood and met your organization's needs?

20. A. ☐ Have consistently understood and met our needs  
 B. ☐ Have usually understood and met our needs  
 C. ☐ Have sometimes understood and met our needs  
 D. ☐ Have seldom understood and met our needs  
 E. ☐ Have never understood and met our needs  
 F. ☐ I have had no dealings with public relations people during the last year

21. Do you consider public relations people professionals in the sense that doctors, lawyers and engineers are professionals?

21. A. ☐ Yes  
 B. ☐ No

22. Do you consider the practice of public relations to be a profession in the sense that the practice of medicine or law is a profession?

22. A. ☐ Yes  
 B. ☐ No

23. Do you believe the importance of public relations in business is increasing, remaining about the same, or decreasing?

23. A. ☐ Increasing  
 B. ☐ Remaining about the same  
 C. ☐ Decreasing

24. Judging from your experience with public relations people during the past year, how would you characterize the competence of public relations people in general?

24. A. ☐ Highly competent  
 B. ☐ Competent  
 C. ☐ Less than competent  
 D. ☐ No experience with public relations people during the past year

25. How would you characterize your opinion of public relations people?

25. A. ☐ Strongly positive  
 B. ☐ Mildly positive  
 C. ☐ Neutral  
 D. ☐ Mildly negative  
 E. ☐ Strongly negative

26. Do you believe that most public relations people do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare?

26. A. ☐ Yes  
 B. ☐ No



J4

27. In your opinion, do public relations people make a sincere effort to facilitate the free flow of information between management and the public?

27. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

28. In your opinion, what is the strongest point of public relations people?

28. A. ☐ Honesty, trustworthiness and candor  
B. ☐ Desire to serve the public interest  
C. ☐ Ability to provide information  
D. ☐ Ability to interpret complex information for newsmen and/or public  
E. ☐ Ability to foster government relations  
F. ☐ Gaining access for media representatives to top officials  
G. ☐ Understanding and providing for news media and their needs  
H. ☐ Middleman between management and news media  
I. ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

29. In your opinion, what is the weakest point of public relations people?

29. A. ☐ Lack of honesty, trustworthiness and candor  
B. ☐ Ignoring the public interest  
C. ☐ Failure to provide information in a timely fashion  
D. ☐ Inability to interpret complex information  
E. ☐ Lack of understanding of news media and their needs  
F. ☐ Serving as apologists for their employers  
G. ☐ Promoting unworthy causes  
H. ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

30. Which of the following do you believe best describes public relations?

30. A. ☐ Winning and retaining support based on worthwhile performance  
B. ☐ Influencing public opinion through publicity  
C. ☐ Influencing public opinion through two-way communication  
D. ☐ Promoting a person, product, idea or institution  
E. ☐ Promoting rapport or good will  
F. ☐ Making people believe something is better (or worse) than it really is  
G. ☐ Manipulating public opinion  
H. ☐ Press agency, propaganda and lobbying

31. Do you consider public relations people ethical?

31. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

32. How would you rank the following in terms of occupational prestige?  
(Place 1 by best, 2 by second best, 3 by third best, etc.)

32. A. ☐ Accountant  
B. ☐ Department store manager  
C. ☐ High school teacher  
D. ☐ Lawyer  
E. ☐ Newspaper reporter  
F. ☐ Public relations man  
G. ☐ Real estate salesman  
H. ☐ Used car salesman

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP. PLEASE MAIL THIS FORM IN THE  
ENCLOSED ENVELOPE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.



## SAMPLE GENERAL PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE

For office use only:

Survey No. 3

Sequence No. \_\_\_\_\_

June 1976

PUBLIC RELATIONS SURVEY

DIRECTIONS: This survey has no right or wrong answers and it is completely anonymous. For questions 1 through 3, please place the best answer in the blank beside the question. For all the remaining questions except the last one, please place an X or a check mark beside the one answer you consider best. For the last question, please follow the directions given in the question. After you have finished the questionnaire, please place it in the enclosed envelope and mail it. No postage is necessary.

1. What is your present age?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many years of formal education do you have?

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the approximate population of the community where you live?

(Your best guess of the population will be fine. Exact figures aren't needed.)

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you now working?

4. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes

B. \_\_\_\_\_ No

5. What is your usual job?

5. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Unskilled laborer

B. \_\_\_\_\_ Skilled laborer or trade

C. \_\_\_\_\_ Office work

D. \_\_\_\_\_ Sales

E. \_\_\_\_\_ Management

F. \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher

G. \_\_\_\_\_ Other professional (doctor, lawyer, etc.)

H. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Before you received this in the mail, had you ever heard the term "public relations"?

6. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes

B. \_\_\_\_\_ No

7. Do you know what "public relations" means?

7. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes

B. \_\_\_\_\_ No

8. Have you ever worked in public relations on a full time basis?

8. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes

B. \_\_\_\_\_ No



9. Have you ever known or worked with a public relations person?

9. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No

10. How often would you say that you see or work with people employed in public relations?

10. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Not at all  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ Once a year or less  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Several times a year  
D. \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly  
E. \_\_\_\_\_ Weekly  
F. \_\_\_\_\_ Daily or more often

11. Do you believe that public relations is a necessary function for most businesses?

11. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No

12. Do you consider that you have a good understanding of public relations?

12. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No

13. In your opinion, is good public relations based on good performance?

13. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No

14. Do you believe the background and training of public relations people are adequate?

14. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know

15. Do you believe that public relations people generally do a good job?

15. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know

16. Do you consider most public relations people honest?

16. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know

17. Do you believe you can trust most public relations people?

17. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know

18. Do you believe that most companies listen to their public relations people?

18. A. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ No  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know



PR 3

19. Do you believe that public relations people give good advice to the companies that employ them?

19. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

20. Have public relations people you have dealt with understood and met your needs?

20. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No  
C. ☐ I have not dealt with any public relations people

21. Do you consider public relations people to be professionals in the sense that doctors, lawyers and engineers are professionals?

21. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

22. Do you consider the practice of public relations to be a profession in the sense that the practice of medicine or law is a profession?

22. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

23. Do you believe the importance of public relations in business is increasing, remaining about the same, or decreasing?

23. A. ☐ Increasing  
B. ☐ Remaining about the same  
C. ☐ Decreasing

24. Judging from your experience with public relations people during the past year, what do you think of the competence of public relations people?

24. A. ☐ Highly competent  
B. ☐ Competent  
C. ☐ Less than competent  
D. ☐ No experience with public relations people during the past year

25. What is your opinion towards public relations people?

25. A. ☐ Strongly positive  
B. ☐ Mildly positive  
C. ☐ Neutral (or no opinion)  
D. ☐ Mildly negative  
E. ☐ Strongly negative

26. Do you believe that most public relations people do work which is in the public interest or which serves the public welfare?

26. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No  
C. ☐ Don't know

27. Do you think public relations people sincerely try to provide a free flow of information between management and the public?

27. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No  
C. ☐ Don't know



28. In your opinion, what is the strongest point of public relations people?

28. A. ☐ Honesty, trustworthiness and candor  
B. ☐ Desire to serve the public interest  
C. ☐ Ability to provide information  
D. ☐ Ability to interpret complex information for newsmen and/or public  
E. ☐ Advising management  
F. ☐ Gaining news media and/or public understanding for businesses  
G. ☐ Middleman between management and public  
H. ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

29. In your opinion, what is the biggest fault public relations people have?

29. A. ☐ Lack of honesty, trustworthiness or candor  
B. ☐ Ignoring the public interest  
C. ☐ Serving as apologists for their employers  
D. ☐ Promoting unworthy causes  
E. ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

30. Which of the following do you believe best describes public relations?

30. A. ☐ Winning and retaining public support based on worthwhile performance  
B. ☐ Influencing public opinion through publicity  
C. ☐ Influencing public opinion through two-way communication  
D. ☐ Promoting a person, product, idea or institution  
E. ☐ Promoting rapport or good will  
F. ☐ Making people believe something is better (or worse) than it really is  
G. ☐ Manipulating public opinion  
H. ☐ Press agentry, propaganda and lobbying

31. Do you consider public relations people ethical?

31. A. ☐ Yes  
B. ☐ No

32. How would you rank the following in occupational prestige?  
(Place 1 by best, 2 by second best, 3 by third best, etc.)

32. A. ☐ Accountant  
B. ☐ Department store manager  
C. ☐ High school teacher  
D. ☐ Lawyer  
E. ☐ Newspaper reporter  
F. ☐ Public relations man  
G. ☐ Real estate salesman  
H. ☐ Used car salesman

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP. PLEASE MAIL THIS FORM IN THE  
ENCLOSED ENVELOPE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.



## ABSTRACT



## ABSTRACT

Public relations in America has never been renowned for its savory reputation. Since the days of the nation's first real public relations practitioner, men and women in public relations have had to struggle to improve the reputation of their own calling as they worked to improve the images of those for whom they worked.

The problem statement for this study asks how senior corporation executives, working journalists and members of the general population perceive the public relations practitioner and the practice of public relations. The study is based on a descriptive survey of 84 top management respondents, 143 journalist respondents, and 70 general population respondents, all of whom were asked in a mail survey about their perceptions of public relations and the public relations practitioner.

The study found that the top management respondents perceive the full spectrum of public relations with more clarity than do respondents in either of the other two groups. It also found that respondents in the journalist sample generally consider public relations a one-way communications function, and it found, further, that there is substantial confusion within the general population sample as to the meaning of the term public relations. In addition, the study found that public



relations practitioners are not generally considered professionals and the practice is not generally considered a profession. Most respondents did, however, consider the public relations practitioner competent. Moreover, a large majority of respondents considered public relations to be a necessary function and felt that good public relations is based on good performance. In addition, most respondents with an opinion on the matter perceived practitioners as honest, trustworthy and ethical. Respondents in all three categories chose "mildly positive" to describe their opinion of practitioners more often than they did any other single description. A majority of the respondents in each sample considered the importance of public relations increasing.

Responses were correlated with one another for each sample group. The major finding in the correlations was that there is a close relationship between the frequency with which respondents saw or worked with practitioners and their attitudes toward practitioners. Generally, the more contact between respondents and practitioners, the more favorable the respondents' attitude was toward practitioners. This occurred independently within all three samples. There was no substantial correlation of age, education, or years of experience with attitude toward public relations practitioners.







Thesis  
B1687 Baker

166535

Perceptions of public  
relations: the prac-  
titioner as seen by  
three of his publics.

28 DEC 76

DISPLAY :

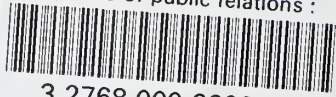
Thesis  
B1687 Baker

166535

Perceptions of public  
relations: the prac-  
titioner as seen by  
three of his publics.

thesB1687

Perceptions of public relations :



3 2768 000 99026 1  
DUDLEY KNOX LIBRARY